

London Assembly Plenary – 7 December 2023

Transcript of Agenda Item 4 - Question and Answer Session: Housing in London

Andrew Boff AM (Chair): We now move on to today's principal business, a question-and-answer session on housing in London. Joining us here in the Chamber are: Conor O'Shea, who is the Policy and Public Affairs Manager at Generation Rent; Fiona Fletcher-Smith, who is the Chair of the G15 Group of Housing Associations in London; Kate Webb, Head of Housing Strategy at the Greater London Authority (GLA); Tim Steer, who is the Executive Director for Housing and Land at the GLA; Tom Copley, the Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development; Lisa Fairmaner, Head of the London Plan and Growth Strategy at the GLA; and Robert Colvile, who is the Director of the Centre for Policy Studies; and Alistair Smyth, Director of Policy and Research at the National Housing Federation (NHF). Welcome to the meeting. It is a long list of people, and we will bear that in mind on your replies, shall we, because a nice, concise reply always helps.

My lead-off question to the Deputy Mayor for Housing is what are the current housing challenges facing London and how can these be addressed?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Thank you very much, Chair, and I also want to say thank you to the Assembly for rearranging the timing of this session so that I was able to attend. It is also very nice to see you, Chair, because I do not get to see you at Housing Committee anymore, therefore, I am looking forward to taking a trip down memory lane today.

I am asked a lot about the challenges facing the housing sector at the moment and my usual response straight off is how long do you have? But given your prompt at the beginning, given the number of people on the panel, I will try to be as brief as possible in my opening remarks. There is an awful lot wrong at the moment. More and more Londoners are being enveloped by the housing crisis. We have had a housing crisis for a very long time, but more and more people are being enveloped by it. Right now, it feels like every single light on the dashboard is flashing red at the same time.

I am going to start with homelessness and specifically rough sleeping. The reason why I could not be with you earlier this morning [7 December 2023], is that I was at St John's Church in Waterloo where the Mayor launched London's first Rough Sleeping Charter, which will see businesses, charities, faith groups, and community organisations rally together with a shared vision of tackling the challenge of rough sleeping in the capital. I will not go into too much more detail about it now, but I will give you the website address if you wish to sign up, it is endroughsleepinglondon.org.uk. Homelessness and rough sleeping are a big priority for the Mayor and since 2016 City Hall's rough sleeping budget has quadrupled. More than 16,000 rough sleepers have been helped off the streets, with the vast majority not seen sleeping rough again.

We are facing enormous challenges as we are elsewhere in housing. Government policies, for example on welfare and on asylum, are driving up numbers. I wrote to the Government recently regarding the streamlined asylum process, which is resulting in many cases now in rough sleepers, rather than getting the statutory 28 days' notice to leave their Home Office accommodation once they have been granted residency, in reality getting only seven days' notice. With the best will in the world, even if you are very familiar with housing in this country, even if English is your first language, it is going to be extremely difficult for you to find accommodation in only seven days, therefore we need action on this.

We also know that the homelessness crisis in London goes well beyond rough sleeping. Rough sleeping is of course the most tragic and the most visible form of homelessness, but we are now seeing more and more people who are living in temporary accommodation (TA); more than 170,000 Londoners are in TA, including one in 23 children. That is one child in every classroom. That is costing local authorities in this city £60 million a week on TA. That is amidst all the other financial pressures that they are facing, and we are seeing councils now across the country being forced to issue section 114 [Local Government Finance Act 1988] notices. We have to get to grips with the TA crisis.

We know that parts of the homelessness crisis are caused by an increasingly unaffordable and insecure private rented sector and we are seeing average private rents soaring. They are expected next year [2024] to reach a level of £2,700 a month, which is absolutely eyewatering. That kind of rapid rise in rents is completely unsustainable. Renters face more insecurity than people living in any other tenure. There is a constant threat of eviction, particularly if landlords think they can get a higher rent from a different tenant. We have been promised a Renters (Reform) Bill and an end to no-fault evictions since 2019. While I am pleased that the Bill has now been finally published, we have seen thousands and thousands of renters in the meantime being served no-fault eviction notices and the Government has said they will not bring in the ban - even once the Renters (Reform) Bill is passed - on no-fault eviction until the court system has been reformed. Therefore, we are going to see even further delay.

I am going to turn to housing delivery. We know that increasing the supply of housing and particularly increasing the supply of social and affordable housing is the best way to improve housing affordability in this city. We have had, as I have said to the Assembly many times, some quite considerable successes on this front in London. We hit that 116,000 affordable housing starts target, extremely challenging, set by the Government. I should add the Government missed their national target by 6,500 affordable homes. But we hit that in London.

We have seen a big shift under that [Affordable Housing] Programme (AHP) towards social housing and a particular shift towards council housing. It was absolutely vital to get councils back into the business of housebuilding, not least because housing association resources were having to be diverted elsewhere, away from newbuild. We are now seeing the newest council homes in London than in any year since the 1970s.

We have also seen success on overall housing numbers as well. It is sometimes said that you cannot have an increase in both overall supply and an increase in affordable supply. We have proved that you can in London with more new homes of all tenures being delivered in this city than at any time since the 1930s. We have seen planning approvals for all homes up 8 per cent in London since 2016, at the same time they have fallen by 14 per cent in the rest of England. But the success that we have seen - and it is not enough, we absolutely need more, we need more support from the Government to do that - is under threat. We have had a perfect storm of Brexit, labour shortages, the pandemic, the building safety crisis, austerity hollowing out planning departments, materials cost inflation, rising interest rates, war in Ukraine, contractor insolvency, and regulatory uncertainty over mandatory second staircases being the latest example of this.

Now, unfortunately, we are seeing a shrinkage as developers pull back from going for planning permission. The biggest factor in that at the moment is second staircases, which I do want to touch on. As you know, the Government consulted on a 30-metre height threshold for mandatory second staircases in December last year [2022]. A year later almost they have not responded to that consultation. Seven months after they launched the consultation, in a speech the Secretary of State [for Levelling-up, Housing and Communities] said that height threshold would now be 18 metres, but provided no technical details or transitional arrangements for

that. As a result, developers are simply not coming forward for planning permission while they wait. They wait for the technical details. What is absolutely vital for the entire housing sector and what they say to me constantly is what they need is certainty. They are not going go ahead with planning permission for a building that might turn out not to comply with the new standards further down the line. It is something that the Government absolutely, urgently has to sort out.

We have been taking action at City Hall. Just to summarise some of the things that we have done: myself and Councillor Darren Rodwell [Leader of the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham] from London Councils brought together the Housing Delivery Taskforce, 27 organisations signed up to more than 20 recommendations to the Government and to City Hall. Can I see Assembly Member Devenish? He is always very keen for recommendations to come to us here as well. We have agreed to a number of recommendations, the key one for the Government being a short-term injection of £2.2 billion in order to get our AHP programme back up to the original 35,000.

We have launched a new Council Homes Acquisition Programme (CHAP), which I know the Assembly will have some questions on. This is going to fund councils to buy properties to use as TA, to tackle that TA crisis that I have already talked about. We are continuing to lobby the Government to devolve powers to London over the private rented sector, to enable us to design a system of rent control that will work in London. Of course, we keep lobbying the Government to pass the Renters (Reform) Bill.

There are many other important issues, not least building safety, and of course the quality and management of homes, which I know the Assembly will have questions on. But I have spoken for rather a long time now. I am looking forward to your questions and I will leave it there, Chair.

Andrew Boff AM (Chair): Thank you very much. We are now going on to the supplementary questions. Each Group is allocated an amount of time proportional to their size. The first question to be asked is in the name of Assembly Member Berry.

Siân Berry AM: Thank you very much, Chair. Thank you very much, Deputy Mayor, for that summary of the many crises we face. We have tabled some written questions today from our Group, and we do discuss things regularly as well. I do have some questions for you today, but they are quite factual and short, you will be pleased to know. Starting with you for a few minutes, I want to ask about the new CHAP. As you know I am a big fan of the Right to Buy-back initiative. I think that we should be buying as well as building new council homes. My Group cannot take the credit for all of this, but we did put forward the budget amendment in 2021, which looked exactly at purchasing homes to let to keyworkers.

Looking at your announcement of the CHAP, I would love it if these were additional social rented homes, but your answer to my Mayor's Question (MQ) 2023/4424 did say this was part of the AHP 2021-26. Therefore, I want to know what has happened to your overall target for social rent homes. Presumably, in funding some of the acquisitions, you have lost some of the grant you are able to give for building. Are you able to give us the new overall target and by what number you have reduced the numbers of social homes that you are going to build under that programme.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Under the overall AHP, we - with agreement with the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), given that the world had changed in terms of the macroeconomic situation, we reprofiled, or asked partners to reprofile. We now have, rather than the 35,000 target, a target range of between circa 23,000 and just over 27,000 homes, reflecting those changed economic circumstances.

Just to say as well, proportionately, there will be more homes for social rent delivered within that because we have been pushing for that for a long time and it just so happened that the Secretary of State [for Levelling-up, Housing and Communities] happened to agree that we should be doing more homes for social rent as part of that.

Siân Berry AM: That is really great. You have given out the number 10,000 in connection with the CHAP. Does that mean you are only now building 14,000?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): The 10,000 is over ten years, therefore it will cover multiple AHPs. The maximum acquisitions we can do under the rules set by the Government - depending on where we get to on the range - between about 2,300 and 2,700 under this programme. That will be the maximum we can do in terms of acquisitions because that is where the cap is.

Siân Berry AM: Therefore, the rest to make up the 10,000 that you have announced you want to build will be in future AHPs?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Future AHPs, because it is over a ten-year period.

Siân Berry AM: OK. That is very useful, thank you very much. We will discuss this further at future sessions. Now, with my time that I have left, I would like to turn to Lisa Fairmaner from the London Plan team. Because this Plenary is looking at the current challenges facing London, we need to look really clearly at what kind of people we are trying to build the homes for and the demographics that are going on. The *Housing in London* report that comes out from the GLA that is towards the Housing Strategy, but I believe your team must have quite a lot of contact with, it highlights that overcrowding in London continues to increase. At the same time, we have - as we saw in the census - demographic changes going on with the number of children on school rolls decreasing. London boroughs are predicted to be losing around 7,000 reception pupils by 2026.

Therefore, we have two issues here, we have families crowded into homes, we have quite a lot of hidden families, parents living with their parents in these overcrowded homes. Then we clearly have other people just deciding to have fewer children and that is a really serious consequence of that level of overcrowding. But also, these are two slightly contradictory trends. Therefore, I wanted to ask what kind of research your team are doing on this and when you are going to be publishing it. Can you publish anything separate on teasing out these trends that come in different types of data as well so that we can understand what is going on?

Lisa Fairmaner (Head of London Plan and Growth Strategy, Greater London Authority): Thank you. We are expecting to do the new Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) next year [2024], therefore the timing of that is quite critical. We have to make sure it is still up-to-date by the time we get to examination in public. But equally we need to know what London's housing need is before we can start having a look at what the London Plan might need to change in order to address that need. That will look across things like tenure, household makeup, and those demographic points that you raise, along with things like multigenerational families and those aspects.

Siân Berry AM: In terms of the kind of research that you are doing, the 2021 census was quite complicated by the fact that the pandemic was still ongoing at that time. The *Housing in London* report says that, it says, "Some of this data may be quite inaccurate". We have the English Housing Survey, and we can only ever use that - because the sample size was cut a few years ago - over a three-year rolling average. Is that enough?

Are your team going to be commissioning additional research to look in more detail at this? Because it seems to me getting this wrong would be really serious.

Lisa Fairmaner (Head of London Plan and Growth Strategy, Greater London Authority): At the moment we are just in the stage of writing up the methodology to make sure that we get the methodology right and we will look to agree that next year [2024] and then go forward with that. I probably should have mentioned as well, we are a long way through the Gypsy and Traveller [Accommodation] Needs Assessment, which obviously will look at that, and we are expecting to publish that next year as well. At the moment we are still looking at what the methodology will be for the SHMA.

Siân Berry AM: Are you confident that you have been resourced enough to do any original research that might be needed to clarify or are you still going to be relying on these data sources that I mentioned?

Lisa Fairmaner (Head of London Plan and Growth Strategy, Greater London Authority): We will certainly take into account those data sources, but we are confident that we are resourced sufficiently to get whatever information that we need to look at that.

Siân Berry AM: OK, thank you very much. I will just move on to another part of the London Plan.

Andrew Boff AM (Chair): Assembly Member Berry, I do not like to interrupt you in full flow, but Mr O'Shea did indicate that he would like to reply.

Siân Berry AM: I am extremely sorry, Mr O'Shea, I did mention to you before in the session that I am very tight on time and that I would not be able to come to any other members of the panel.

Conor O'Shea (Policy and Public Affairs Manager, Generation Rent): It is just incredibly brief. Generation Rent have just published a report on the trends of private renters within the UK but specifically within London. The biggest trend, the overhead trend we have seen is suburbanisation, people moving outwards, especially because of the cost. I am happy to send that report across to the Assembly.

Andrew Boff AM (Chair): Thank you, Mr O'Shea.

Siân Berry AM: That would be very kind, thank you. I am really sorry, I am very much on the clock here. You cannot see my clock, but it is quite scary to see the time ticking away. Lisa, I wanted to come back to you. Obviously, data-gathering and evidence are really important, but also engagement with Londoners, consultation with residents of London, consultation with different groups of Londoners. I know you have already had a number of stakeholder events and I have specifically asked about youth engagement. I am still a bit concerned that these stakeholder events are slightly self-selective, people who are already interested in planning and that may not include young people, and a bit exclusionary therefore in their nature. What other work are you doing to ensure that your engagement with Londoners about the new London Plan is representative of the demographic of our city, including young people?

Lisa Fairmaner (Head of London Plan and Growth Strategy, Greater London Authority): Of course. There are ten different programmes that are underway, of which some of them are self-selecting and some of them are not. In terms of the ones that are not, we had 160 participants spend six hours with us exploring the challenges London faces. Those cohorts were in groups of 40 and each one was representative of Londoners as a whole.

In terms of the youth voice, we have somewhat hijacked the Design Future London programme - that is now in its third year - to use that to understand and bring the voice of children and young people into the next London Plan. There are specific sessions with schools running today and tomorrow and then we have cohorts specifically from schools with high Pupil Premium, high Special Educational Needs and Disabilities need, coming in all throughout the week next week to run specific engagement with them to understand - in two parts - their priorities and aspirations for the city they live in, but also as part of the wider design challenge we want to understand, when they have designed an amazing thing as part of their Design [Future London] challenge, what we are going to take from that is what were they trying to achieve, why were they trying to achieve that, what were their priorities, whatever that might be. That will all be part of that first phase of the Planning for London Programme.

Siân Berry AM: That sounds really interesting. I am glad that you are going and engaging at the school level as well because that is where you will find the parents. Are you trying to engage also with people who have maybe chosen not to be parents?

Lisa Fairmaner (Head of London Plan and Growth Strategy, Greater London Authority): Yes, when I go back to the deliberative events that we hosted, they also included things like household makeup and family makeup to ensure that it was representative of London as a whole. I can always provide the criteria by which people were specifically recruited and that is by invitation only to participate in that. Therefore, we had a baseline of views and priorities and information from people who were representative specifically for that reason. So that when we do the self-selecting work, we had something to compare it against.

Siân Berry AM: OK, thank you very much. Now, the final thing I wanted to ask was in what order are you going to be publishing all of these things? The SHMA is really useful and comes with a lot of background papers. From our point of view as an Assembly trying to engage with it, it would be helpful to see some of the background papers in advance. Do you have a publication schedule going forward for the evidence base as it emerges? That would be a really useful thing for us to be able to see.

Lisa Fairmaner (Head of London Plan and Growth Strategy, Greater London Authority): We do not for the SHMA, no. As I said, the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA), which is the other half of that piece of work, similarly that is going to be a live database from next year [2024], that will launch next year, that people can put sites into, and they will go through a process. But there will be a mechanism for that to bring forward so that we have a live picture of understanding about housing land availability across London. Those two projects will go live, we expect, towards the middle of next year.

Siân Berry AM: That is really exciting. Was that in any way influenced by the work that we did to put forward the idea of having a People's Land Commission and enabling people from across London to contribute to thoughts about their own particular neighbourhoods and sites within it?

Lisa Fairmaner (Head of London Plan and Growth Strategy, Greater London Authority): We have definitely been conscious that there should not be any gatekeeping of the bringing forward of potential sites. There has to be some analysis to make sure that sites do not come forward that are not appropriate to be on that list. But, nonetheless, anybody should be able to put forward a site, whether that is the development industry, whether that is a member of the public, but also thinking about publicly owned land, for example. Therefore, there should be a range of ways in which we bring sites forward and understand what the capacity is across London and those opportunities.

Siân Berry AM: Thank you very much. As you know, part of the reason I am very enthusiastic about having a People's Land Commission is due to the fact that when I was quite young I took part in the BBC's *Domesday Project*, which enabled me to go out and look at my local area in a way that went on to some exciting laser discs. But also, this concept that going into schools and asking schools to take part in this again is where everybody is. Is your school project going to link up with that SHLAA sites project in any way and are schools going to be invited to contribute to that? Because that would be one way to open up access in a way that reaches everybody.

Lisa Fairmaner (Head of London Plan and Growth Strategy, Greater London Authority): We were certainly not planning for young people to be putting forward sites specifically and we would definitely have an age limit on it because there is a data management issue there. One of the things that we are trying to work through, for example, is how to manage that data because there may be some confidential sites that somebody might not want the employees that are currently employed there to know that there is a potential it could change its use. Therefore, we are trying to work through all the data management issues.

I would not envisage that is the case but what I would suggest is that we have guidance now - and it is very clear in the London Plan - that local areas should do a characterisation study. That characterisation study should lead towards the growth strategy for an area. There is definitely an opportunity for children and young people to have a voice in expressing their sense of place, what is important to them, and those things as well as part of that wider work that we would see being done at a local level, or a neighbourhood level.

Siân Berry AM: OK. The SHLAA will not be for children but potentially we might be able to talk again about involving them a little bit more. OK, great, thank you very much.

Andrew Boff AM (Chair): Thank you. Next to Assembly Member Moema please.

Sem Moema AM: Thank you. Good afternoon, panel. My question is to Deputy Mayor Copley. London Councils estimates that each month boroughs are spending upwards of £60 million on TA. In fact, we heard from them at Housing Committee a short while ago and I am sure you have seen the reports of one example of this, a school in Peckham where 80 per cent of the pupils there are living in TA and are therefore homeless. Therefore, I want to know what we can do to ensure Londoners have access to safe and secure accommodation.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Thank you very much, Assembly Member Moema. Yes, this is absolutely tragic for the people, the families and the children concerned. But it is also a huge drain on the taxpayer and on local authorities to have so many people having to be housed in TA because there is not enough available other accommodation, permanent accommodation for them to live in. It really is a top priority. Coming out of the London Housing Delivery Taskforce, one of the very clear asks from London Councils was for the Mayor to produce another programme along the lines of Right to Buy-back, which had success in bringing in around 1,300 homes, half of which were social and half of which were for TA.

We have listened and we have responded to that. We have launched the CHAP programme, as I mentioned earlier. The rebrand is not just cosmetic. Right to Buy-back suggested that councils could only buy properties that they formerly owned. That was never the case, they could always buy any market sale property obviously up to the right price point. But this makes it clear that they can be acquiring other properties as well. This is very attractive to councils because it means that they can expand their supply of housing, move people into cheaper accommodation, and reduce their bill.

But fundamentally we are going to need more action from the Government as well, there is no getting away from that. We need more funding to build social housing. I remember when I was a councillor and we would be shown the graphs each year, the number of voids that come up in social housing versus the number of people who require TA. The voids would be coming down and down and down and the TA numbers would be going up and up and up. Therefore, we urgently need Government action to fix this.

We also need action on the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates as well. It was welcome that the Autumn Statement [22 November 2023] did rebase them at the thirtieth percentile, having frozen them for several years, but that is only a one-year unfreezing. It goes back to being frozen after that. We have to make sure that there are enough homes out there that people can afford to live in.

Sem Moema AM: Thank you. That touches on another question, which I will come to. This may be one that Fiona may have a view on as a registered provider (RP). I just wanted to ask you, Deputy Mayor Copley, are you concerned then about the impact that growing up in TA is having on children's health and wellbeing and how proper provision of permanent accommodation is really integral to that?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Yes, extremely concerned. The health impacts, often families in TA will be overcrowded, often the quality is very, very poor with the associated health impacts. But then there are also the long-term impacts on child development from children growing up in that kind of environment, perhaps not having any quiet space where they can do their homework, perhaps having to move schools or have to travel very, very far to get to their previous schools. This, for me, I often talk about the invest-to-save case. You invest more upfront in building, you save more down the line. That is nowhere more apparent and more obvious than for TA. If councils in London are spending £60 million a week on TA between them, that is £700 million a year, more than £700 million a year, £740 million a year, that is ridiculous. That is not far short of the annual AHP budget we have, which is about £800 million a year. This makes no sense. We need to be spending that bit more upfront, or quite a lot more upfront, but to save quite a bit down the line.

Fiona Fletcher-Smith (Chair, G15 Group of Housing Associations in London): Just to add to what Tom has said on this, with G15 and the London boroughs, we are working on a project that we are calling Project 123, which is named after the appalling fact that one in 23 children in London do not have a permanent home. What we are trying to do is recognise that for housing associations who have been moving more and more towards being financially self-sufficient, we are reliant on sales, we are reliant on selling homes, and in the current market that is not possible. Therefore, it seemed to be a sensible idea to look at what empty stock we have as the RP sector and work then with London boroughs to see if there is something we can do between us to use that as TA. It is slow at the moment. We kicked it off end of August, early September [2023], and it is slow because we are trying to do something new. But I have to say, with the help of Tom and his team here, the absolute willingness and openness of the London boroughs we are working with, and GLA colleagues, I am sure we will crack through some of these problems. Our first 20 properties are going to three London boroughs at the moment. It does not sound much but if we can prove concept and get going at pace it will really help.

Sem Moema AM: Thank you for that. You touched on the increase to the thirtieth percentile of the LHA, which is welcome, but problematic in that it will be refrozen after one year. What issues does this raise for affordability in London? Then to you, Conor, and to Tom if you want to comment as well, what do you think can be done to support households struggling to pay this winter? I have seen your evidence to the Select

Committee in Parliament therefore I know that you have touched on some of this. But within a London context, what more could be done here?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): It is a very good question. The unfreezing for a year, it might only be a year, it is still welcome. But we have to recognise as well that, although it is being realigned at the thirtieth percentile, that is the thirtieth percentile of average rates, the Valuation Office Agency. What we know is that the asking prices for new properties are considerably higher than that. The previous time this was done, although it was realigned at the thirtieth percentile, that left less than 19 per cent of listings affordable. That then, because it was frozen, reduced considerably over time.

I suppose I would put that it is kind of doing just enough to keep it ticking over, perhaps just making sure that things do not completely fall over for a year. But it is really not enough and the Mayor has called for it to be back to median rents, which is what it was before [The Rt Hon] George Osborne [Former Chancellor of the Exchequer] came in and introduced austerity, which has led to so many of the problems we are now facing.

Sem Moema AM: OK, thank you.

Conor O'Shea (Policy and Public Affairs Manager, Generation Rent): I do agree entirely with the Deputy Mayor there with that analysis. We have a really difficult situation for private renters across the board. LHA supports those at the bottom end of it largely, but across the board rents are reaching the most unaffordable rate that they have been since records began. As you have mentioned, it is a national phenomenon but ultimately this is a London thing as well and they are most unaffordable in London by any metric.

The number one thing, we do have to build more homes, this is a conversation that I know goes on extensively in this Chamber and elsewhere. These homes have to be affordable, and the affordable metric is often a difficult one for people because 80 per cent of market rents is still really high and especially as the market rent is going through the roof. Londoners across the board are struggling to pay that. That is something we could potentially look at.

We also do hear the Mayor speak often about rent controls and the devolution of powers to bring rent controls in London. It is certainly something that should be explored even as an emergency measure because we do know just how difficult affordability is becoming for so many people across the board. We are going up proportionately with people's incomes into 40-50 per cent of people's incomes and we only expect that to go in one direction. It is frankly unsustainable, and it feeds into a lot of the concerns that Assembly Member Berry raised earlier regarding the future of our city, how can people afford to live here and have a family here if they are paying out 50 per cent of their income on rent. Therefore, if something like that is an emergency measure it certainly should be considered and explored in a progressive way. Thank you.

Sem Moema AM: Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

Andrew Boff AM (Chair): Thank you. Assembly Member Lord Bailey.

Lord Bailey of Paddington AM: Thank you, Chair. Good morning to the panel. Tom, I was hurt that you only missed Andrew and you did not welcome seeing me!

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): But I see you regularly now, Assembly Member Bailey.

Lord Bailey of Paddington AM: OK, apology accepted. Tom, I want to focus on the delivery of the AHP because of course you were given £4 billion to deliver some homes, 151,000. You have reached that target, but we have only had completions of 62,441. When will these other affordable homes be available, delivered?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): They will be delivered over the coming years, is the short answer to that. Just to say, on your point around completions, we have had more than 40,000 starts in the last two years and with the best will in the world it is going to be difficult to get a completion straight away out of starts over the last two years. It was an enormous achievement to get in those 40,000 starts over those two years. As I have said to the Assembly before, we expect the vast majority of those homes that have started under the AHP to be complete by 2030, a very small number are due to complete after that.

The reason why this is over a long period is because in London so many of these homes are on long-term estate regeneration schemes. What this has meant of course is that housing associations and councils have been able to conduct these schemes in a way they would not have been able to if we had, for example, a hard completions deadline. There are many factors that I have discussed out there, which are creating issues, not least quite a number of contractors have gone bust recently. Obviously, if a contractor goes bust partway through a build, that means one of our delivery partners has to procure a new contractor, the cost will go up because it is more expensive for a new contractor to come on to a scheme because they are dealing with something that they did not start off themselves. Therefore, all the factors at the moment out there are deeply challenging.

I would note finally the latest Government affordable housing statistics are out, there were more than 15,000 affordable homes completed in London last year.

Lord Bailey of Paddington AM: Just quickly to talk about contractors going bust. Have you had any go bust on schemes that you are financing?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Quite a few. I do not think we have comprehensive data to hand, although I am quite keen that we get hold of that, but quite a number of our delivery partners have been affected by some quite key contractors going bust recently. We know that last year more than 400 contractors went bust across the country compared with 290 in the year preceding the pandemic. I also know from talking to the big developers there are particular issues with London because in London, because of our built environment, they have to contract with reinforced concrete contractors, some of whom have gone bust, and some of whom are working overseas. Therefore, there are very big challenges out there for our delivery partners in terms of their supply chain.

Lord Bailey of Paddington AM: Thank you. I will come back to you, Deputy Mayor. Robert, maybe I could come to you. Do you think there is anything the Mayor could have done to deliver more homes from the original AHP? Because 62,000 of 151,000, some would argue, is quite slow.

Robert Colville (Director, Centre for Policy Studies): There are two aspects to that, one is the thing the Deputy Mayor said about they said it was impossible to increase overall supply and affordable supply. That is nonsense. The way that you increase affordable supply in most of the country is that you approve market housing, and you say, "As part of this, you need to build a certain proportion of affordable houses". Therefore, you grow the affordable supply, you grow the overall supply as well. That is just how it works.

In London, as the Deputy Mayor said, it is mostly estate regeneration, but that does not take account of the fact that most of these estate regenerations are knocking houses down as well in order to build the new ones. The Ledbury Estate in Southwark, in the Mayor's statistics that is 260 affordable housing starts but that is really 340 new homes, 244 demolitions, and a net gain of just 21 affordable units. Do you count that as 260 affordable homes or do you count that as 21 affordable homes? I would say, if you are talking to Londoners about how you are solving the housing crisis, that should be 21 affordable homes.

I know there is time pressure, there are all sorts of issues around this, but in terms of the simplest way to build more affordable housing is just to approve more housing and indeed possibly to lower the quotas on the percentage of affordable housing that each development needs. Because, if you speak to developers, they do say that the fact that the Mayor has instituted a much higher threshold has meant that the affordability calculations on projects have come down. In fact, despite he is often castigated by the Mayor, I notice that if you look at the GLA's own figures, [The Rt Hon] Boris Johnson [former Mayor of London] built 11,750 affordable homes every year and the Mayor has built 8,419 affordable homes every year. Now that may not include the latest splurge of affordable starts, but it is certainly in terms of total affordable completions the Johnson regime did a lot better, even though, as I will accept, they did have a slightly different definition of what an affordable house was.

Lord Bailey of Paddington AM: Deputy Mayor, I know there is a question you would like to answer, but I would really appreciate if you answer the question I want you to answer. With the new AHP, you are two and a half years in, and you have not built a single home. When can we expect some of those homes to even be started? I know you are going to want to address some of that, but please address that while addressing what I have just asked you because I am on the clock.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): I will, Chair. I do feel that I have addressed this several times in the Assembly, your question, but I have to just come back on some of that. First of all, Mr Colville says we have to focus on increasing overall housing. We have done that. In fact, in 2022, 66,000 homes were granted planning permission in London. That is the highest level ever. It exceeds the housing needs figure in the SHMA as well of course as the housing target in the London Plan.

At the same time, on schemes that are referable to the Mayor, 150 units or more or buildings over 30 metres, we have gone from 22 per cent affordable under Boris Johnson to 45 per cent by habitable room last year.

Lord Bailey of Paddington AM: Deputy Mayor, I am just going to - hold on, hold on - I want my question answered. I understand you have things you want to say.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): I absolutely will. So, under Sadiq [Khan, Mayor of London] we have seen the number of market sale homes go up as well as the number of affordable homes. Just to say on estate regeneration, if you look on the London Planning DataHub, which looks at net affordable housing completions rather than gross, last year [2022] more than 9,000 affordable homes were completed in London. That is the highest in ten years, since 2011/12, and in 2011/12 there were only 19 above that. In fact, before that you have to go back to 2008/09.

To address your question, it is just because I feel I have addressed this many times before, we were only allowed to get underway with the 2021-26 AHP once we had final sign-off from the Secretary of State [for Levelling-up, Housing and Communities] on the reprofiled AHP, which only came in July this year [2023]. With the best will in the world, it is very difficult to get homes certainly completed in that time. We have only had six months where our partners have been able to deliver under the AHP. It is all very well saying the

Government announced the funding, it is quite difficult for me to go, for example, to Fiona and say, "You can go to your board, Fiona, and say, 'Do not worry, Tom said he thinks it is going to be all right. We do not have sign-off from the Secretary of State, but Tom thinks it is going to be OK.'" They cannot get underway on that basis.

Lord Bailey of Paddington AM: Deputy Mayor, do you think maybe your team could have got to their endpoint more quickly because we had your original AHP, it took so long to complete, members of your team said that they could not concentrate on anything else because they were trying to complete that. Do you think that had some kind of effect on your ability to deliver and enter into that conversation with Government?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): The delay in this AHP all came essentially from the Government. We were ready to get into contracts with our partners in October 2021. We were told we were not allowed because there was a dispute between the Treasury and DLUHC. Therefore, we were only then permitted to get into contract in autumn 2022, by which time, as we know, the world had changed, the [Rt Hon] Liz Truss [MP, former Prime Minister] mini-budget or fiscal event [September 2022], as it was called, had unleashed chaos, and we had to undertake this reprofiling exercise. I would add as well that it is not ideal having to run two AHPs concurrently, but that was a decision that the Government took. Usually, programmes are rolled into each other rather than having a hard deadline. This was the first time that had not taken place. It was not our decision; it was the Government's decision.

Lord Bailey of Paddington AM: OK. With your current AHP, do you think you should have a target, a delivery target, rather than a 'starts target'? Because a cynic could argue that the other figures are not entirely trustworthy because they only talk about stats [statistics]. I know you will say that the Government asked you for stats, but could you not give yourself a delivery target? Why do you not have one?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): The delivery target is the target range that we have put out there, but our full intention is to ensure that, whatever we come to in terms of that delivery range, those homes will be completed. Our partners want to be completing homes once they have started them.

Lord Bailey of Paddington AM: Of course, everybody wants to complete them, and I am not trying to catch you out. What I am asking you is, do you believe that you as a team, the Mayor should set a delivery target for your next AHP?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): I view that target range as our delivery target. We are working against it.

Lord Bailey of Paddington AM: Sorry, let me use the word "completions". Should you set yourself a completions rate, date, target?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): We have a completions date, there is a hard deadline for completions, which is 2029. However, we think it would be probably preferable if that target was moved to allow more long-term certainty for partners. Kate, do you want to come in?

Lord Bailey of Paddington AM: Sorry, I would love to, but I just want to go to Robert to maybe get some balance here. Robert, do you believe that the Mayor should set himself a target?

Robert Colvile (Director, Centre for Policy Studies): Yes, I do. I have had various discussions with City Hall on this, challenging the lovely posters we have all seen saying Sadiq Khan is delivering more homes. I asked what your definition of delivering is and I was told this is housing starts. I was also told that this was standard, and this was what Homes England does. It is not what Homes England do. Homes England, in their annual reports, say very clearly starts and completions. Likewise, the main housing statistics that we all regard as the most acceptable, the net additional supply, are based on homes that have been built. Therefore, I think a completions target would be a very good idea.

Lord Bailey of Paddington AM: Thank you.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): We do report our completions in the same way that Homes England do. I am not sure what --

Lord Bailey of Paddington AM: No, no, but what you set yourself is the question here, Deputy Mayor, do you set yourself that target? Because I will commend your team to get to the 151,000, that was hard work, we commend you, we wish you all the success in the world. But it has taken quite a while. Some of those homes, by your own admission, will not be delivered until after 2030. Londoners would like to know when the next set are going to be delivered and not starts. Because many of these homes, let me ask the question, how many of these homes are beyond just a shovel in the ground? You have your 62 [thousand completions], fine, how many of the remaining are beyond just a shovel in the ground?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): To answer your question, Assembly Member Bailey, as I have mentioned, we have a completions deadline for the AHP, which is that homes for the 2021–26 AHP, which is the homes need to be completed by 2029. Therefore, I do not know where the confusion is here.

Lord Bailey of Paddington AM: The confusion for me is how quickly. What is the rate? When are we going to get these homes? Because we constantly hear about, for instance, 151,000 homes being delivered. If you are a Londoner, you think those homes are ready to move into, that is clearly not the case.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): But there is a completions deadline of 2029. That is when they will be completed by, because that is the deadline.

Lord Bailey of Paddington AM: OK. I am going to have to stop now because I am getting glares from the rest of my team. But we need to be a bit clearer about when these times come in. Thank you, Tom, thank you, Chair.

Andrew Boff AM (Chair): Thank you. Assembly Member Bokhari please.

Hina Bokhari AM: Thank you, Chair. Deputy Mayor, I am really pleased that you have managed to rearrange your timings to allow this to happen because, as you can see, the questions that we are asking, and your introduction does highlight the importance of this area and I am really pleased that we can cover this. Now I am going to talk a little bit about the experiences of those living in social housing in London and it is pretty bleak at the moment. For example, a Lambeth Council tenant, a man with complex physical and mental health issues, suffered 15 years of ongoing issues in his council flat. For the past two years, he has been without heating or hot water. There has been water bursting through pipes and pouring through the upstairs balcony. He has not had a working shower for seven years. Southwark Council has also been forced to apologise unreservedly for a council housing project, which overran by two years and overspent by £4 million. There is definitely a crisis in social housing and action needs to be taken on multiple levels to address it.

Now, in March this year, the Assembly passed a motion on damp and mould in social housing, and I welcomed the Mayor's response in June [2023], he said that tenant satisfaction measures would be taking place, which will require landlords to collect information from and also face scrutiny by their tenants. That was launched in April. Can you provide any information as to what the response rate has been and whether the measures have been successful?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Sorry, can you repeat the last bit, sorry?

Hina Bokhari AM: His response, after the motion was successfully passed, was that he was going to have tenant satisfaction measures, which were going to require landlords to collect information.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Yes, these are the Government's tenancy satisfaction measures, which are being brought in as part of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act [2023].

Hina Bokhari AM: And that they were going to face scrutiny, yes.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): The GLA does not have a role in terms of being a regulator of social housing. Obviously, we work with the Regulator and we, as you know, have set out some requirements around action we will take where there are regulatory notices and judgments issued against our delivery partners, the steps we will take, the investigations we will make, and in some cases the fact that we will withhold funding for newbuilds where there are particularly egregious cases. We are very supportive of the Government introducing these tenancy satisfaction measures.

Hina Bokhari AM: I also understand from the Mayor's response that access to capital grant funding has been restricted to some social landlords, which have been found to have breached standards set by the Regulator of Social Housing. Why not go further and finally commit to implementation of a mayoral gold standard, which we were calling for in our original motion?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): I now cannot recall the exact wording in your original motion. The thing that we desperately need is a new round of Decent Homes funding. The Government has been consulting on Decent Homes 2 and we have fed into what we think should be included in that new standard. But, crucially, if there is a new standard that is going to be introduced, there has to be funding available for delivery partners and for housing associations, for councils, to be able to implement it. There are enormous pressures, as you know, on budgets at the moment. There is a lot being spent in terms of tackling the building crisis. There is a lot being spent now on retrofit and a lot needs to go into repairs and maintenance. That is before you even get to newbuild. Therefore, we really need additional funding available in order to bring these properties up to a standard --

Hina Bokhari AM: I would appreciate if we could get a response on the mayoral gold standard because the motion was based on the fact that the Regulator of Social Housing and Housing Ombudsman [Service] said that we needed to develop a gold standard on damp and mould for London's social housing. It was based on recommendations from the Government, therefore it is something that we should definitely look into, particularly from the Mayor's perspective, because it will make a big difference.

I would like to also ask about the time that he responded in June [2023], he said there were three social landlords that had their access restricted. Is this still accurate and what is the current number?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): I would need to double check with my colleagues if they are still restricted.

Kate Webb (Head of Housing Strategy, Greater London Authority): Yes, it is now six partners who are restricted. It is obviously a fluid situation because the hope is that if a partner is restricted, they will be able to work with us and work with the regulator to get out of that and be able to receive funding again. Because what is important to remember is that often it is new social housing supply which is the root solution to all of this. Therefore, it is always a delicate balance we need to strike between creating the right incentives, carrots and sticks, for partners to be clear that this is something we take seriously, while still enabling them to grow and develop new stock. Therefore, it is always a fluid balance to be struck but at the moment it is a total of six providers who have had their capital restricted.

Hina Bokhari AM: OK, thank you. I'd like to move to Fiona and Alistair next. You will struggle to find anyone who is living in social housing who says that they have not experienced issues to do with damp and mould. Can you tell us a little bit more of the challenges that housing associations are facing when it comes to combating this particular issue in their housing supply? Do you want to go first, Alistair?

Alistair Smyth (Director of Policy and Research, National Housing Federation): Sure, absolutely, thank you. All of our housing association members take reports of damp and mould incredibly seriously. Before, but particularly after, the case of the Coroner's report into the tragic death of Awaab Ishak, put comprehensive programmes in place to go out to their tenants and assess the extent of damp and mould and to encourage as much reporting as possible from tenants across their stock. The programme of remediation work has been going on among our members ever since then to try to remediate and to resolve those issues. Of course, there are wider funding pressures on housing associations, which have been alluded to here, and I know you are time-bound, therefore I will not go into them at this point, but they do have an impact on access to labour, cost of labour, cost of materials, etc.

Alongside that, I just wanted to highlight the work the NHF has done with the Chartered Institute of Housing on the *Better Social Housing Review*, which was commissioned and published in 2022. We published a joint action plan in 2023 setting out seven points of actions that the sector is taking to improve the quality of its homes and to improve the quality of its services and to improve the way that we are responding to and working with tenants to get issues like this resolved and addressed.

Hina Bokhari AM: Fiona, do you think that any incentives and deterrents can encourage housing associations to combat this issue and do you think that the work that we have just seen with the Mayor's Better Renting Programme has made a difference and a desired impact that we want to see with social landlords?

Fiona Fletcher-Smith (Chair, G15 Group of Housing Associations in London): It is simpler than that. What you are seeing particularly from the larger housing associations in London, the G15, is a refocus. Now, unfortunately, that refocus is away from building new stock and, as Kate has said, that is part of the problem that we are going to have in the long term. That refocus is on existing homes, our existing residents, and investing in their homes. The G15 will spend £1.5 billion per year over the next ten years on existing homes and getting them up to a decent standard.

But there are two things I would throw in. In addition to the problem of the supply chain and the labour shortages we have, just to give you a London and Quadrant (L&Q) [housing association] example on supply chain problems, up until six months ago we had one roofing company covering 80,000 homes. I was delighted to see that the Home Office added roofers on to the list of occupations allowed into the country because we frankly could not find them for love nor money. I would dread every morning opening my inbox if it had been raining the previous night because there were serious, serious problems.

The other issue I would say on damp and mould that we need to be very clear about is poverty is an issue here. I went out with our damp contractor in January [2023] on one of the coldest days of the year and I was in a gentleman's flat in southeast London where it was colder inside his flat than it was on the street. Now this man was working and what he was explaining to me was he could not afford to keep his heating on, and the mere act of breathing was causing condensation on his cold walls. Breathing is not a lifestyle issue, it is just something that is a fact of life that we need to get on with.

The other issue in London, and again it goes to both Kate and Tom have mentioned this, is overcrowding is a serious problem when you have mould and damp. One of the most serious cases from my own organisation that appeared on ITV breakfast programme was a woman who had four children and expecting a fifth living in a one-bedroom flat. In that particular borough, for her to get the size of home she needed, the average wait time was over a decade. Therefore, we need to build more to help with damp and mould as well as investing in the homes. It is not the simple issue of going in, fixing the damp problem. It is a big and complex problem and the incentive for all of us is our residents deserve better. An additional layer of regulation is not going to do that. It is like reconnecting with social --

Andrew Boff AM (Chair): I apologise, you are talking about a very serious issue and --

Hina Bokhari AM: I do have other questions, but I will write to the Deputy Mayor.

Andrew Boff AM (Chair): Unfortunately, the Liberal Democrat Group is now out of time. I did not want to come in too early, you have had quite a few seconds over your time. Assembly Member Hall please.

Susan Hall AM: Thank you. Good afternoon, everybody. If I can start with Robert, please, is it realistic to expect 50 per cent affordable housing on public sector land, compared of course with the 35 per cent for private sector land, especially in the current climate, and to what extent has this put off public landowners from developing their surplus land, especially as they are obliged to achieve best value?

Robert Colvile (Director, Centre for Policy Studies): This is not something I am an expert on. I would say there is a *prima facie* case for a higher threshold. The publicly owned land, the joy of it, especially maybe it is owned by Transport for London (TfL), is that you do not have to pay the land cost. The main cost of building property or building anything is land. It is a huge proportion. If you get the land for free, especially if you have the air rights, for example, above stations, that does allow you to put up the affordable quota.

There is an issue around being sufficiently ambitious on that and, actually, that is not just the Mayor's fault. That is partly about the capital allocations that are made in Whitehall. But the publicly owned land in general and TfL land in particular is an enormous resource that we could and should be using to build a lot more things.

The new plans for Euston, for example, would be one example of that and the stuff that has happened in Victoria, the [Ken] Livingstone [former Mayor of London] strategy of building around the hubs. I have worked in Victoria for about 20 years. It has been transformed.

Susan Hall AM: Yes. Certainly, I know there were great hopes for this. If I can turn to you, Tom, if I start off by saying, at the beginning you said regarding housing all the dashboard lights were red. I would be mortified if I had been the Mayor for seven and a half years and all my dashboard lights were red, absolutely mortified, but no doubt you will all continue to blame somebody else because that is what you do. With regard to --

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Just to say, Assembly Member Hall, I would be mortified if I had crashed the economy by borrowing for unfunded tax cuts, but there we are. This is --

Susan Hall AM: Yes, you can talk about other things. We are talking about housing, and we are talking about your record here. All the dashboard lights are red.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Assembly Member Hall, the cost of finance is quite a considerable one for our housing delivery partners.

Susan Hall AM: Can you tell me why so much time has been wasted trying to push through unacceptable schemes on TfL station car parks that have either lost their appeal, such as Canons Park, which is near where I am; been withdrawn, like the one at Stanmore, which is also near where I am, or been overruled, like in Cockfosters, which is near where I am.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): It is an interesting one, Chair, because Mr Colvile, who is of course, I believe, a Conservative and involved in writing the Conservative Party manifesto in 2019, is saying to us that we need to push --

Susan Hall AM: He has lots of other good points as well.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): -- density and height on TfL sites. But I know there are many Assembly Members in this room who seem to think that a tall building is something five storeys or more. These were very good, very well-designed schemes. It is a shame that they did not get through planning, but I am very pleased to say to the Assembly Member that there are now 4,500 - approximately - homes either completed or under construction on TfL land.

I want to address some of the previous points as well. You call it a 50 per cent requirement on public land. It is not actually a requirement. It is a threshold over which you get a fast track through the planning system. If a piece of land for some reason cannot support that level of affordable housing, they can go down the viability tested route. Obviously, we want to see as many come forward with 50 per cent or more as possible and we have seen quite a bit of success.

In terms of Mr Colvile's point about the land being free, a lot of the land that TfL owns and indeed the land that the GLA owns via GLA Land and Property has quite high remediation costs and, for TfL land, there are a lot of operational factors they have to take into [account] as well. The land is not without cost - is what I would say - in terms of actually making it suitable for housing development.

Susan Hall AM: OK. All right. What should the Mayor be doing - or you, Tom - to identify surplus public sector land for housebuilding in London? What more land?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): We are doing whatever we can through using our own land, but we are also looking quite carefully through the work of the Homes for Londoners Subcommittee, which was set up following the Kerslake Review [of GLA Group Housing Delivery, March 2022]. We are working with partners, including on this panel, to look at how we can make best use of public land, how we can find adjacencies and undertake land assembly. There is some quite exciting work being undertaken at the moment by TfL, although it is not in the public domain yet and so I am not going to quite put it out on this panel but working with public sector partners in order to assemble sites to deliver more housing.

Susan Hall AM: OK. You mentioned the Kerslake Review. That highlighted failings, asset management plans being out of date and a fragmented approach to housing delivery. What has been done about that?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Sorry, repeat the particular line from the Kerslake Review that you just quoted, please, Assembly Member Hall.

Susan Hall AM: I do not have that. I just have that it -- well, shall we get back to you and you can give us a written answer?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Perhaps because I want to make sure I am answering the right point.

Susan Hall AM: It said that failings highlighted in the review included asset management plans being out of date and a fragmented approach to housing delivery.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): The whole point of the review in terms of housing delivery was that we work much more closely together as a group. We have seen quite a bit of success on that. Lyn Garner, as you know, the Chief Executive of the London Legacy Development Corporation, was appointed --

Susan Hall AM: Asset management plans being out of date.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): I was addressing the point about fragmented -- I think you said fragmented --

Susan Hall AM: Asset management plans being out of date.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): I would have to write to you specifically on that point, Assembly Member Hall.

Susan Hall AM: Yes, OK. If you would. I do not have much more time but, before I finish, would you like to go through the rest of the guests and tell me what their political persuasion is?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): I would not dare. Some of the guests are GLA officers.

Susan Hall AM: No. Actually –

Andrew Boff AM (Chair): Assembly Member --

Susan Hall AM: -- that is quite right. It is absolutely appalling that you sit there and do that because it is inappropriate. But then you know all about inappropriate. I will finish there because of my time. Thank you.

Andrew Boff AM (Chair): Assembly Member, you have -- Assembly Member -- can we stop the shouting? If Members want to absent themselves and have a fight behind the bike sheds, you are welcome to do that, but please do not do it in here. Actually, I was going to say, Assembly Member, I do not believe it is appropriate to attack the affiliations of other guests. They bring what they bring out of their own expertise and so I would ask you to refrain from that.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): My point was in relation to Conservative Members opposing high-density schemes on TfL sites. That was the point I was making.

Andrew Boff AM (Chair): Which you were not asked your opinion on. Can we stick to the questions that are asked and not descend into a fight about political affiliations? It does not make us look good as an Assembly. Can we move on next to Assembly Member Cooper, please?

Léonie Cooper AM: Thank you, Chair. I would like to ask the Deputy Mayor for Housing [and Residential Development] a question about preparedness for winter. We have already had a couple of cold snaps.

Given the massive pressures on public services, particularly local authorities, as a result of the acute housing crisis that we have been describing, do you feel that rough-sleeping services will be able to cope with increased demand this winter? It is good to hear about the new [Rough Sleeping] Charter that has just been launched.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Yes. Thank you, Assembly Member Cooper. This really is at the top of all our minds at the moment because of the acute pressures, as you say.

We have been standing up, as we always do, what we call Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) accommodation, which is stood up by the boroughs and our charity partners. Also, SWEP overflow accommodation is being stood up by the GLA as well and so we can take people if the borough accommodation gets full up. We have about 890 spaces.

But it is still going to be an extremely challenging winter if temperatures drop. We had more people come into SWEP last winter than we have ever had before. Under the Mayor's "In For Good" principle, we do not ask anybody to leave without an offer of further support. It is not that people are kicked out the moment the temperature goes back above zero.

Léonie Cooper AM: It is quite obvious that the people that I am seeing under railway bridges and suchlike at the moment have increased in number, but I can safely say it is not a lifestyle choice because none of them are using tents. They are using just bits of cardboard and things like that.

One of the areas that is of particular concern to me, and I know to many of us are the services for women who are sleeping rough. We know that they are more subject to abuse on the streets and difficulties in that area, but only 12 London boroughs have specific services tailored to women. What measures do you think can be

put in place to support women who find themselves in this appalling predicament this winter? Is there anything more that we could do to help?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): The Mayor and the GLA have recently supported for the second year the pan-London Women's Rough Sleeping Census. This is an exercise that has been developed by specialist women's services to show the true extent of women's rough sleeping in the capital and to make recommendations as to how services can better meet women's needs. That data piece is really important across the board within homelessness.

We have also provided capital and revenue funding for a new specialist service serving women sleeping rough in south London. This provides both safe, stable accommodation and expert tailored support. That is going to make a real and immediate impact.

Léonie Cooper AM: I hope so, but we have just been discussing the problem with supply of family accommodation. It is true across the board, of course. Even single people who are sleeping rough will find it difficult to make their way into socially rented housing, particularly if they also need ongoing support for a period when they arrive there.

I actually want to turn my attention now, if I may, to something that we have touched on a bit, which is the situation with cold, damp, and mouldy homes. One of the announcements that was made was about pushing back the date by which private sector landlords needed to bring their properties up to a decent standard. I might start with you, actually, Conor, if you do not mind. Would you agree that bringing properties up to a minimum level of energy efficiency is the best way to tackle cold, damp and mouldy homes?

I am thinking very specifically of the private sector. I understand that the NHF and its members are really doing a lot, even though Fiona has set out a timetable that goes over a number of years and a lot of expense. I am really worried about the private rented sector, where we know conditions can be very poor.

Conor O'Shea (Policy and Public Affairs Manager, Generation Rent): Thank you, Assembly Member Cooper, for raising that. It is an important point because conditions in the private rented sector are worse by pretty much any metric in this field than they are in social homes, which is not at all to diminish concerns about social homes, but Generation Rent operates in the private rented sector and that is where the worst conditions are by any metric. The decision to shelve is not a delay. It is actually a cancellation of the uplift of the minimum energy efficiency standards. It is appalling. It is a terrible move from central Government. We really would like to see that reversed as soon as possible.

Frankly, one of the key reasons for the terrible state of the private rented sector when it comes to energy efficiency, damp and mould is that there is no incentive for landlords to bring up the level of energy efficiency in the homes. Firstly, there is the obvious point that landlords do not live in these homes, and they do not pay the bills, broadly. That is a natural reason why they may not want to do so. But actually, without this regulation, there is no stick for them to bring it up.

What I would like to address, though, is the fact that there are plenty of Government-funded grants that are available for tenants and landlords to help bring the position of the private rented property up to a decent energy efficiency standard and they are not being used. The key reason why they are not being used is that tenants know that they are particularly vulnerable to eviction or a rent increase after that happens. It is no protection for a tenant if a property is improved under Government money for a landlord to then go, "This property is now of a higher standard than it was before. Therefore, I am going to increase your rent", or,

“Therefore, I am going to evict you and put somebody else in”. That is something that absolutely has to be addressed as soon as possible: protections for tenants who can then take up these ‘eco-grant’s and use their own status to improve the quality of their home and ultimately reduce damp and mould.

Léonie Cooper AM: Yes, then it comes back to the whole point that we were making earlier about the lack of security of tenure and people also feeling afraid to raise problems and issues in their property because they might be served with a [notice under] section 21 [of the Housing Act 1988] at that point rather than, if the works are done, them being served afterwards or suffering a massive rent increase. It is a very poor situation.

Fiona, you did touch on the need for this expenditure, and I wondered if you could say a little bit more about that. It is quite a situation that we find ourselves in.

Fiona Fletcher-Smith (Chair, G15 Group of Housing Associations in London): Absolutely. I would reinforce what Tom has said about the need for grant income to help on this. It is £1.5 billion. It is not just about damp and mould. It will be taking a ‘fabric-first’ approach to all of the G15 stock. That will take us all, more or less, to Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) level C. That really is not sufficient. We would need to go further than that. But that is all the money will allow at the moment.

Léonie Cooper AM: We are in a very poor position here for everybody talking about moving to meeting net-zero and fitting heat pumps if we do not use the ‘fabric-first’ approach because heat pumps do not work terribly well if you have a very leaky home. Clearly, we need to be doing both, do we not?

Fiona Fletcher-Smith (Chair, G15 Group of Housing Associations in London): We do. We also need to look at this through the lens of residents as well. We need to make sure that the solutions that we come up with are not actually adding to the cost for residents. For example, the move to electric [heat] pumps at the moment is far more expensive than gas, but we do need a solution to move away from gas. Again, we would urge for some long-term thinking on this so that we can all makeshift and make that secure investment that we know is going to be supported by long-term policy.

Léonie Cooper AM: On that point, I would like to come to you, Deputy Mayor, if I may. Do you think that the Autumn Statement [22 November 2023] went far enough in supporting the kinds of areas here at all? Was any support given that would help us?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): It was extremely disappointing. Seeing the rowing back on these requirements is going to have real costs, both in terms of the environment, in terms of tenants themselves. We estimate that homes rated below EPC C cost £300 a year more to heat than more energy-efficient homes. That is a big cost to the tenants, never mind of course the health costs that they may experience as a result of that, and the cost to the NHS.

Léonie Cooper AM: A massive cost to the NHS.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): We released a [Housing] Research Note [11, November 2023] last week, which has found that if you addressed all the category 1 hazards - damp and mould and things like that - in people’s homes, it would cost £1.2 billion to do that but it would save the NHS £100 million a year and so you would recoup that saving in 12 years. If that is not ‘invest to save’, I do not know what is.

Léonie Cooper AM: Of course, it also means that people's lives will be improved. Children will probably be doing better at school because they will not be trying to study in a cold home.

In light of the death of Awaab Ishak, do you agree that pushing back the deadline for the private rented sector to come up to EPC C is just completely irresponsible, actually. I cannot think of another word.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Absolutely. Mine is a stronger word than 'irresponsible'. This is something that can literally cause death.

Léonie Cooper AM: And has.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): And has caused death. Yes, I would say it is incredibly irresponsible.

Léonie Cooper AM: Just irresponsible. Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

Andrew Boff AM (Chair): Thank you. Yes, please, Assembly Member Fortune.

Peter Fortune AM: Thank you, Chair. If I can slightly pun off Ben Disraeli [19th-century Prime Minister], there are lies, and there are damn lies, and there are 'Sadiqstics'. I know. Thank you very much.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): It is a low blow.

Peter Fortune AM: There is a certificate available if you can beat it.

People get confused with these numbers and these different kinds of measurements, right. Let us look at raw numbers. If you build 100 houses over ten years and you knock down 90 houses over ten years, how many new houses should that count as?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): How many additional market sale homes were built as a result of densifying that particular area, which is something that has not been addressed in what other panellists have said? How much additional floor space is being provided in terms of the new social rented homes that are being built? It is important that we do not look just in terms of units but at the overall size of homes as well. I know that family-sized housing is a key issue for people on the Assembly.

Just to repeat the number I gave earlier - because I know this is about net and gross affordable homes - last year we had the highest net affordable homes completed in London since 2011/12 --

Peter Fortune AM: What I am really looking forward to is years from now, when they look up 'Sadiqstics' in the dictionary, that is going to be an example of what it is. We go back to what Robert Colville was talking about with the Ledbury Estate, which despite [having] 260 units being described as new, actually net there are only 21 --

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): There will be additional --

Peter Fortune AM: -- and we are going to see this again with the CHAP, where there is money being made available to buy housing and then be counted as new housing and completed housing. Just --

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Could I just add that on the Ledbury, I do not --

Peter Fortune AM: Let me finish and then you can come back. Is it right that the Mayor presents replacement housing as new housing?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Firstly, this is exactly the way that the statistics are presented by Homes England. This is the generally accepted way of presenting these statistics. As I said, just to repeat, on estates like the Ledbury - and I do not have that particular scheme in front of me - I am pretty certain there are market sale homes being delivered on that estate and possibly other forms of affordable housing that did not exist before and so you are seeing and uplift. We will not count those units, though, because they are not affordable homes, the market sale homes. However, they are only being delivered because we were able to support the regeneration of that estate.

Peter Fortune AM: OK. Robert, I would be interested in your view on this and the way that these statistics are being used for housing, especially over this last year as well, when the numbers are quite poor, but on a more general point. Is London building enough and what can be done to improve it?

Robert Colville (Director, Centre for Policy Studies): Yes. Estate regeneration is a brilliant thing. It is great. We knock down old, crumbling, mould-filled properties that people do not like and we build them new ones. That is why these estate regenerations tend to get massive endorsement from the people whose homes are being replaced. They build additional housing as well and that is really good.

I have two points quickly. On the statistics point, this is not a dig at the Deputy Mayor. The statistics on London housing in general are woeful and there are multiple clashing versions of the statistics. For example, if you look at the bedroom breakdown on the GLA website, it will tell you that in the first half of the year 2023/24 Tom and his team managed to deliver three affordable houses. Even I would not say that Tom had delivered only three affordable houses, but that is what the statistic says. Tom has just said that they have actually delivered 15,000 so far this year but, again, on the other statistics, you --

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Last year [2022/23].

Robert Colville (Director, Centre for Policy Studies): Yes, but other statistics say between April and September 2023 there were 142 affordable starts compared with 21,000 last year. If that is true, that is appalling, but I do not know how true it is. There just seems to be -- the net additional dwellings data is completely different from the stuff on the London Planning DataHub. On one, Sadiq Khan has built less than Boris Johnson on every metric. On another, he has actually improved housing. We need to really clarify those things.

In general, in terms of London's housing, what we have heard consistently today is that, fundamentally, this is about supply. I do not doubt that everything else is a huge problem as well, but we only solve all of these sub-issues if we increase the overall supply of housing. Demand for social housing historically tracks the market price of housing. It tracks affordability because people, ideally, want to live in a home of their own and then fall back on the state if they can. The TA statistics are utterly awful. Things like CHAP are basically 'robbing Peter to pay Paul'. They are taking from one part of the housing market and giving to another. That may be urgent and necessary, but it still means that by definition you are buying homes from landlords, or you are

buying homes from owner-occupiers in order to house people. You are probably housing slightly more people because of how social housing works, but it is not a long-term solution. It is a plaster on a wound.

Tom and his team have said that London has outbuilt the rest of the country under Sadiq [Khan's Mayoralty]. They have increased housing stock by eight per cent versus six per cent. But (a) that is less true than it was. In the last year, [the data shows] housing completions in London fell ten per cent, whereas [it was] broadly flat in the rest of the country. London's share of national housebuilding has always been lower than it was under Boris Johnson. It is now the lowest it has been since the [Global] Financial Crisis [2007-2009].

But the point is London should be building far more than the rest of the country. London is the place where the housing pressures are greatest. Affordability in London is 12.5 times the average salary. That is the worst it has been ever in this country anywhere. This is an absolutely massive crisis.

I am going on a bit, sorry, but, under net migration, there were 600,000 jobs created. I have the figure somewhere, but basically there were 680,000 new pay-rolled employees in 2022, of which roughly 420,000 were non-European Union citizens. Of those 420,000, 100,000 of them ended up in London because London is where people want to be. Once you factor in population growth, London has built the fewest homes of any part of the UK since 2001.

This is not just on Sadiq. This is a general thing. London is the fastest growing area of the country, and it is where the pressures are greatest. We should be treating this as a national emergency and a national crisis because it is.

Peter Fortune AM: Thank you very much. That is my time. Thank you, Chair.

Andrew Boff AM (Chair): Assembly Member Desai, please?

Unmesh Desai AM: Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon, panel. My question is to the Deputy Mayor. Tom, proposals made earlier this year to expand TfL's public transport connections have the potential to unlock 30,000 new homes. How important is investing in transport infrastructure to tackle London's housing crisis and what is needed?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Thank you very much, Assembly Member Desai. Transport infrastructure and housing are completely interlinked. We cannot deliver housing at the scale that we need if we do not have the public transport connections. Obviously, we do not want to be building car-dependent developments and sticking more cars on the roads. This is going to be absolutely vital.

The London Housing Delivery Taskforce identified that a lack of investment in transport infrastructure is holding back opportunities to unlock homes in London. There are some particular key sites, some of which will be quite relevant to you in terms of your constituency, Assembly Member. The most crucial thing that we need - and this has been called for by public and private housebuilders - is for a long-term funding settlement for TfL.

Unmesh Desai AM: Talking about my constituency, also known as City and East London, London moving east, I am pleased that progress is being made in the TfL Beckton to Thamesmead connection. Many years ago, the first Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, made plans for a bridge crossing at Beckton. Given the many housing developments in Barking Riverside and Beckton, many of us in East London would argue that there is

a case for looking at the Docklands Light Railway (DLR) extension along the river, connecting the two areas, Beckton to Barking Riverside. We have 34 bridge crossings west of Tower Bridge but, on the other side, east of Tower Bridge, you do not have any until you get to Dartford. This is more of a comment than a question. Can you comment on my comment?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): It shows an inequality in terms of where transport infrastructure historically has been delivered in London. What it says to me is that we need that DLR extension down from Beckton Riverside down to Thamesmead. What that will do is unlock the delivery of 30,000 new homes.

Unmesh Desai AM: I am pleased with the progress, but I just want to keep on plugging the case for a bridge crossing --

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Please do. It is less than £1 billion. It is a bargain for what it will deliver. I do not like to use this term because it is a 'Boris-ism' but, in terms of 'bang for buck', you are going to get a lot for that.

Unmesh Desai AM: And the DLR extension. I will keep on plugging away for that along the river. My last question, Tom. I hope I have time.

The National Infrastructure Commission has recommended that a new longer-term model for capital investment for TfL should be agreed, as is the case for other major cities, to enable the continued enhancement and expansion of London's public transport network, which will unlock growth opportunities and additional housing. Have the constant short-term deals with TfL impacted what additional housing could be delivered in the capital?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Yes, massively. To give one particular example, we have been pushing very strongly for the Bakerloo line extension and, in expectation of the Bakerloo line extension, an awful lot of development and planning applications were going in along the Old Kent Road. I am very sorry to say that there are more and more sites around there that are stalling now because we do not have the Bakerloo line extension and we desperately need that. I do not just say that as a Lewisham resident because, ultimately, it will come down to Lewisham and we hope one day maybe through Catford down to Hayes.

But this is essential. TfL is now able to fund only about three quarters of its capital investment programme for this year and so we absolutely desperately need Government support for these critical projects.

Unmesh Desai AM: Not my constituency, but the good people of southeast London would certainly benefit from the Bakerloo line extension. Thanks, Chair.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Absolutely.

Andrew Boff AM (Chair): Thank you. Assembly Member Rogers, please?

Nick Rogers AM: Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon, panel. My question is for Robert. Robert, last month [November 2023] there was a *Telegraph* article looking at how the Mayor's policies hold back delivery of housing in which you were quoted. I wonder if you might be able to give us your views on how you think

mayoral policies around things such as Strategic Industrial Land (SIL) are actually holding back the supply of new housing.

Robert Colvile (Director, Centre for Policy Studies): Yes, the Mayor's policies on SIL are holding back the supply of new housing. That is pretty obvious. The example given in that report was of the McVitie's factory up near Wormwood Scrubs. I love McVitie's. I love all of their products, as you can see. I have consumed probably rather too many of them. But it strikes me as deranged, in an area that is soon going to be within walking distance of six major stations on Crossrail, on High Speed 2, on the existing lines as well, that whole area, to keep it as single-storey industrial space when the value you can unlock by turning it into housing and the homes you could create are immense. It would be more than enough to relocate the factory to pretty much anywhere else in the country.

We had exactly this with the Olympic Park and the H. Forman [& Son] salmon factory. I do appreciate that you want to keep working people in London. You do not want to turn it into a middle-class enclave. But many of these sites are absolutely the places you could be building at significant scale. You can do it without annoying people because they are industrial sites. They do not have neighbours to complain about the noise and the disturbance.

Nick Rogers AM: Thank you. The same article goes on to quote a housebuilder who said that the cumulative effect of the Mayor's policies had reduced the number of homes in one individual project by up to 30 per cent. Aside from SIL, what other mayoral policies do you think are holding back housing delivery?

Robert Colvile (Director, Centre for Policy Studies): I have a lot of sympathy with Tom on the point he made about second staircases. That is a central Government issue. The Grenfell Report did not call for this. In fact, the Grenfell Report specifically said the evidence for moving from 30 to 18 metres was pretty limited.

My overall thing would be just the view that housing can be built only if we get money from central Government to do it. The justification for the fall-off in housing between 2022/23 and 2023/24 has been, "The Government stopped giving us money", but it is also partly because they crowbarred as many projects as they could in to meet the deadline. But you can just approve stuff and get affordable housing and social housing, even, as part of the deal.

This is not just on the Mayor. This is on everyone. My position is that the housing crisis is the single biggest public policy problem in this country. Anything we can do to build any kind of housing - retirement housing, social housing, council housing - we just need to whatever we can.

Nick Rogers AM: A broad open question - and I have only a couple of minutes left: what would you like to see different from the next Mayor?

Robert Colvile (Director, Centre for Policy Studies): A more permissive approach to housing. Generally - and again, this is not the Mayor's fault - the structure is broken. You have councils. You have the Mayor. You have national Government. In London even more than anywhere else, there are multiple layers of veto, multiple points where things can be objected to.

I would also just like a lot more transparency about exactly how much housing is being built, where it is being built, when it is going to be built by and how much demolition is going on alongside it. If you are a Londoner looking at these adverts on the Tube, you get the impression that the housing crisis in London is being solved and it is absolutely not.

Nick Rogers AM: Thank you. Sorry, Deputy Mayor, I am out of time. Chair, back to you.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): I need to be able to rebut some of that, particularly in relation to the industrial land.

Andrew Boff AM (Chair): No, I am sorry. You do not. The question was not asked of you --

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): I do not know what Mr Colvile has against Jaffa cakes, but anyway.

Andrew Boff AM (Chair): The question was not asked of you. It was asked specifically of Mr Colvile. Let us move on to the next Assembly Member. Assembly Member Hirani, please.

Krupesh Hirani AM: Thank you. Feel free to come back on the issue of SIL, Tom Copley, because McVitie's is a major employer in Brent, at Park Royal, and the industrial area around that area employs over 30,000 people in the area and so it is a major site in terms of employment. Do feel free to come back.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Thank you. Yes. Whatever London's housing need, it also needs employment sites and industrial land in the right locations. Park Royal is an absolutely unique economic cluster. It supplies over a third of the food consumed in London. It is established in a strategically important industrial location, 2,000 businesses, as you say, employing thousands and thousands of people.

Just to say on this, London has lost 18 per cent of its industrial land between 2001 and 2020. The Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation (OPDC), which includes Park Royal, has already allowed the release of 100 hectares of industrial land, which will accommodate nearly 15,000 homes just in the OPDC area. It is simply not true that we are not looking strategically at this. We are also supporting as well through the GLA projects like Industria and Stacked Industrial, which help us to intensify industrial land and free up land for housing development.

Krupesh Hirani AM: Thank you. Thank you for highlighting the importance of using land in different ways to mix what happens on there because we want communities to thrive and be employed but also have things for people to do as well in the culture and leisure space.

Following representations from the Mayor on the value of estate regeneration and providing good-quality homes that Londoners need, DLUHC confirmed that City Hall can provide grant funding to replace homes demolished through estate regeneration. That has been recurring as a theme in some of the previous answers. But before we reach that point, I can think of at least one major estate regeneration that did not go ahead because this rule was not in place. What has the impact or the opportunity cost to Londoners been as a result of this coming far too late?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): It has caused great difficulties for delivery partners in terms of being able to plan for the long term and this is a recurring theme. It is also very difficult for partners to plan for the long term, and we have to bear in mind that estate regeneration schemes by their very nature are long term over many years and the fact that we do not have funding certainty post-2026. Also, the completions deadline of 2029 does make it difficult to achieve what [The Rt Hon] Michael Gove [MP, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities] has said he wants to achieve because, if they have to complete by 2029, it is very difficult, again, to do a long-term estate

regeneration scheme. The way that the programme itself has been designed by DLUHC pushes against the thing that they are now telling us to do, which is estate regeneration.

But we will not just be looking at estate regeneration schemes out of that remainder of the programme that we are now open for continuous market engagement. We will be looking at schemes that, for example, will provide early delivery, that are a good strategic fit and things like that.

Krupesh Hirani AM: Thank you. I am going to turn to Alistair because, at the time of the announcement, the NHF said that it was “hugely welcome” and, “For too long housing associations have simply not had access to the funding needed to replace social homes that are no longer fit for purpose”. That, I know, for elected Members who represent areas that have large social housing stock, is always an issue in terms of the quality of them, which has been alluded to also earlier in this session.

Do housing associations now have what they need to regenerate their estates or does more need to be done by the Mayor and the Government?

Alistair Smyth (Director of Policy and Research, National Housing Federation): We certainly welcomed it. We have been making the call on Government to extend funding for regeneration through the AHP - or anything else in fact - for a long time.

The £500 million made available through Continuous Market Engagement was welcome. There are limitations on it. You have to start by March 2025. The sites still have to prove net additionality and so it is not perfect, and it is not exactly as the way we would have liked it to be designed. But it is a step in the right direction.

Does it meet our long-term needs for estate regeneration? The point has already been made - estate regeneration is long term and so we have not cracked that nut yet. We still need to keep making the case to the Government that there needs to be larger sums made available over a longer period of time and, indeed, we would like to see that set out clearly in a long-term plan published by the Government, talking about how it is going to increase the supply of new homes and estate regeneration. It is a good start but, yes, more needs to be done.

Krupesh Hirani AM: OK. Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

Andrew Boff AM (Chair): Thank you. Assembly Member Garratt, please?

Neil Garratt AM: Afternoon, everyone. Obviously, it is easy work to sit here on a panel and explain what the Government should be doing and, very quickly, without really noticing, you can commit billions of pounds of spending on vast sites that we do not own or control. You said earlier, Tom, that urgent Government action has been required. I have not quite been keeping track, but it seems to me that every time you have spoken you have explained what the Government should be doing differently or is doing wrongly or should not be doing at all because it is, apparently, completely wrong.

Obviously, you have been involved as a Labour Assembly Member and now a Deputy Mayor and in Labour City Hall administration for many years. You have been involved in housing in the Labour Party. What assurances do you have from [The Rt Hon] Sir Keir Starmer [MP, Leader of the Labour Party] or his team that - imagining a scenario where we have a Labour Government - were that to happen, what assurances do you have that all of those things that you have been listing at great length today would be tackled?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): I took very great heart from the amount of airtime that housing got at the Labour Party conference, not just on the fringe but of course it was front and centre of Keir Starmer's speech as Labour Party Leader. That is really important, and I have to say it contrasted with the Conservative Party conference, where I do understand there was quite a bit of housing discussion on the fringe but it was not even mentioned in the Prime Minister's speech, which speaks to their priorities.

You would not expect an Opposition to be setting out its spending priorities in detail at this stage. That is not the way things work. But the great thing about devolution and the great thing about mayors - whether it is the London Mayor or the metro mayors - is that they are able to make the case for the things they want to be devolved to their areas, not just to the current Government but to their own party as well.

Neil Garratt AM: No assurances from the Labour Party that if in government --

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): I have said I am extremely assured by the direction of travel and by what I have heard.

Neil Garratt AM: It was awful and now it may be less awful? That is a direction of travel.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): God forbid there might be 12 months until the next election. That is a long time for an Opposition.

Neil Garratt AM: Sure, but you have been sitting - not in this building, actually, to be fair - notionally in City Hall since 2012 as a Labour Party person who is very interested in housing.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): It is a long time.

Neil Garratt AM: Exactly. During that time, you have not had a single assurance --

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Where has the time gone?

Neil Garratt AM: -- from your national party about what they would do if they were in government?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): I cannot sit here and reveal the nature of any private conversations. As much as I may want to, Assembly Member Garratt, I must be keeping the powder dry, as it were.

Neil Garratt AM: You sort of give the impression that all these things are quite easy, and the Government is being very silly or wrong or 'dunderheaded' or whatever word you might like. Surely then it would be easy for you to say the Labour Party would not make any of these mistakes that you keep calling out. Can you give us that assurance?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): I am not saying it is going to be easy to clean up the mess of the last 13 years. It is going to be extremely challenging. Keir Starmer has set it out very clear. But I am --

Neil Garratt AM: Not clearly enough to assure you on a single one of the points that you have been asking for. Not one of them he has assured you on.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): As I say, I am not going to sit here and talk about any private discussions or whatever that we have had. What I will say is that the airtime and the focus that housing is now getting from the Opposition is very welcome.

Neil Garratt AM: OK. You have said that. You are repeating yourself now. Including on your popular rent control idea? You have had no assurance that the Labour Party would give you the power to do the rent control that you say you want to do?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Our ask on rent control is for devolution. What works in Camden may not work in Carlisle and so --

Neil Garratt AM: You had asked on rent control that you would be allowed to set up a commission. But no one is stopping you setting up a commission, are they?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): In order to set up that commission, first of all, we would need proper rental data, which we do not have, which we hope we will get through the Renters (Reform) Bill, if that indeed does make it through Parliament before the Government collapses. I do not see why we would do this before we have the powers devolved to us. The ask is: devolve us the powers and we will set up the commission.

Neil Garratt AM: But you need to say what you would do in order to know what powers you would want devolved.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): No, the ask is for devolution of powers to introduce a system of rent control into London --

Neil Garratt AM: But there are many systems and so you have to say which system you want in order to be given the powers to do that system.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Yes. That is why we have said we will set up a commission.

Neil Garratt AM: When?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): We are not going to --

Neil Garratt AM: When will you set up a commission?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Once we have the powers to do this. I do not see why we would do it before we have the powers to do it. We have already --

Neil Garratt AM: I am sorry. You would --

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): By the way, the Mayor has set out quite clearly his blueprint and London model for renting and so there is already quite a bit of work there.

Neil Garratt AM: But not rent control. You see the silly circular argument you are making. You want the powers to do a form of rent control. Which form of rent control and therefore which powers? You do not know until you get the powers to do it.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): I do not agree with you that it is a silly circular argument. We are not going to just transplant a system from another city or another country. We are going to come up with a system that works for London and that is the point of this commission.

Robert Colvile (Director, Centre for Policy Studies): One reason to come up with a different version is because no version of rent control has ever worked overall ever.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Go to Vienna.

Robert Colvile (Director, Centre for Policy Studies): It is completely different there.

Neil Garratt AM: Just to finish, Tom, I should go and look at Vienna and what is happening there is what you would like to do?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): That is not what I have said. What I have said is it works in Vienna. They have their own system of rent control. I am not saying that the system of rent control that they have in Vienna can just be transplanted into London any more than I am saying that the system of rent control they have in New York could be transplanted into London.

Neil Garratt AM: OK. Robert, just on rent control, is there a form of rent control that might be worth exploring, do you think, for London?

Robert Colvile (Director, Centre for Policy Studies): It is genuinely the single idea that economists most agree is a bad one. If you look at what is happening in Edinburgh now, it is very good for the people whose rent is being controlled. It is very bad for people in the wider market who are trying to get houses. It leads to misallocation because people stay in housing longer than they should because they are getting a subsidised price and also it discourages landlords from repairing the properties. There is just a lot of evidence --

Neil Garratt AM: Some people's rent gets pushed down and other people's rent then goes up. Is that what we are seeing?

Robert Colvile (Director, Centre for Policy Studies): Yes, basically.

Neil Garratt AM: That sounds like an awful idea. I apologise. I am out of time. I can only apologise. Thank you, Chair.

Andrew Boff AM (Chair): Mr O'Shea had indicated.

Neil Garratt AM: Mr O'Shea has indicated but I am afraid I really have run out of time, Chair. I apologise.

Sem Moema AM: May I intervene? Chair, I would like to intervene and ask Mr O'Shea to come in on that, please, for one minute.

Andrew Boff AM (Chair): You can put your name down on the list.

Sem Moema AM: Are we not allowed to do interventions from the floor?

Andrew Boff AM (Chair): No. You can go on the list, and I can put you on the end.

Sem Moema AM: All right.

Andrew Boff AM (Chair): Assembly Member Sheikh, please?

Sakina Sheikh AM: Thank you, Chair. My question is to the Deputy Mayor regarding the Renters (Reform) Bill that you made reference to just now. As you will know better than me, it is four years delayed. The area of the Renters (Reform) Bill that we are particularly interested in is the ban on section 21 [of the Housing Act 1988] no-fault evictions. This four-year delay has led to more than 10,000 Londoners being evicted since it was initially promised. We are pleased to see that it is finally in Parliament, but there is now potentially further anticipated delays to bringing in the kinds of practicalities around the no-fault evictions under section 21 given that we need to see court system reform set up first. Those are the noises coming from the Government.

I wanted to ask you what impact you think this indefinite delay will have on renters in London in the private sector. Thank you.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Thank you for the question, Assembly Member Sheikh. After four years of waiting, to then get a Bill that is not, on the face of it, in the place that we would quite like it to be and then to be told that the bit of it that we have really been pushing for that was a [Conservative Party] manifesto commitment, no-fault eviction, would be further delayed, is beyond frustrating. We estimate, based on the rate of issuing of no-fault evictions, a six-month delay would mean almost 15,000 more Londoners facing no-fault evictions. In the midst of the rest of the housing crisis that we have been discussing, it is never a good time to be evicted but it is an extremely bad time at the moment.

Sakina Sheikh AM: I am really pleased that you are articulating the concerns that we are feeling here in the Labour Group as well. For me, it just speaks to dysfunctional governance. You set out an ambition four years ago and you have still failed to deliver it when we know that this is at the core of the housing crisis, the no-fault evictions and escalating homelessness. I really struggle to understand beyond dysfunctional governance whether it is actually deliberate because it is beyond me how you can struggle to set an ambition over four years ago and still fail to deliver.

One of the aspects of the Bill that I wanted to ask you about as well is potentially the effect on domestic violence victims. It is probably best I use the words of experts rather than myself on this, but the Domestic Violence Housing Alliance stated that the changes that are drawn out in the Bill:

"... could have dangerous consequences for tenants in need of additional support including victims-survivors of domestic abuse who are four times more likely to have antisocial behaviour complaints made against them, often due to the misidentification of domestic abuse as antisocial behaviour."

This expansion of reasons why one might become evicted due to antisocial behaviour (ASB) looks like it could have quite a detrimental effect on domestic abuse victims. I wondered if you could speak to that and whether you agreed and whether that analysis was also something you shared.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Yes, we have expressed concerns to the Department [DLUHC] regarding this as well based on, of course, the concerns of many charities operating in this space that this could have a negative impact on victims of domestic abuse.

We also think there could be broader impacts as well. Changing the language in the discretionary ASB ground from 'likely' to 'capable' of causing nuisance is very open to exploitation because it is pretty ambiguous.

Sakina Sheikh AM: Again, I agree. The language is something that has alarm bells ringing for us on the Labour Group here as well.

Conor, I wanted to bring you in in case you wanted to add on this. I will combine my last follow-up to both you and Tom. I guess, if there were further amendments we wanted to this Bill - and it has probably passed that point now but, again, we do not actually anticipate delivery of this coming in - what would you add to improve the Bill?

Conor O'Shea (Policy and Public Affairs Manager, Generation Rent): Thankfully, we are not past that point. We at Generation Rent - but there are many stakeholders as well - are working very hard to get some amendments put into the Renters (Reform) Bill. The first of those is that section 21 will be abolished on the day of royal assent. That is something that is absolutely vital. The numbers that have been thrown around are entirely accurate of just how detrimental section 21 is and that needs to continue.

The reason why section 21 is so detrimental is because it gives you two months through no fault of your own when you have to leave your home and, actually, that will continue under the current proposals in the Renters (Reform) Bill. There are new grounds for landlords to regain possession of their home, which we do not fundamentally disagree with, things like when the landlords wish to sell their property or when they wish to move themselves or family members in. The problem is that, if that happens, you still have the same two months. Through no fault of your own, you have to leave your property.

We need that time to be longer. We need a longer notice period for that. We need proper enforcement to know whether landlords are actually doing this or whether they are looking to circumvent the system and do section 21 by the back door. That is an absolute priority for what we are going to do. But the ASB ground is something that we are really looking at as well, crucially, for the reasons that you said. It is domestic violence victims. It is people who suffer from mental health and everybody who has miscategorisations of ASB.

Just one thing to add to your excellent analysis already is that there is a two-week turnaround. Under the proposals, that means that you can be told, and you will have two weeks to leave your home. That is significantly lower than under any other type of eviction and we know that these people who are vulnerable are just not going to be able to find a home in that amount of time.

Sakina Sheikh AM: I appreciate your comments, Conor, and I am actually out of time, Deputy Mayor, and so I will not bring you in on this, but Conor has covered it.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): He has covered it.

Sakina Sheikh AM: Brilliant. Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

Andrew Boff AM (Chair): Assembly Member Best, please.

Emma Best AM: Thank you very much. Good afternoon, panel. Deputy Mayor, you have talked a lot today about the failings perhaps you perceive. I wonder when you look --

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Could you repeat that, sorry?

Emma Best AM: I said you have talked a lot today about the failings you perceive perhaps from the Government. When you look back at your own record and deliveries of the first London AHP and other schemes, is there anything that you think is a lesson learned or something that you think you could have done better and will do better in future?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): It is always a tricky question to answer when you are put on the spot because I imagine, yes, there are things that we will learn. In fact, on that very point, Assembly Member Best, we have produced - and I have committed to share with the Assembly if we have not already - a lessons learned piece from the AHP 2016-2023. That will contain reflections on the delivery of that particular programme.

Again, it is quite tricky to answer that question on the spot because I remember starting this job the week we went into the first COVID lockdown. Starting this job at any time would have been extremely tricky but starting it then was especially difficult. I need a little bit more time to reflect on some of my personal lessons learned.

Emma Best AM: Really? Sometimes it is quite obvious. Anyway, I wanted to move on and ask you perhaps about the Housing Moves scheme, which has been significantly restricted. This is a scheme that under the previous Mayor was pretty successful in moving hundreds of people. Why is that scheme so restricted? Have you looked at that and how you can widen it out again to make sure more people are able to use such a scheme?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): This was due to the limited number of homes that were becoming available through it and so we took the decision to restrict it to two particularly vulnerable groups, rough sleepers and victims of domestic abuse, to ensure that it was being directed at the neediest client groups --

Emma Best AM: Sorry, just to intervene only because of time, Tom. Surely there is a difference between prioritisation, which you could do with those groups, and restrictions.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): I might bring Kate in on this one because -- did you want to come in on Housing Moves?

Kate Webb (Head of Housing Strategy, Greater London Authority): Yes. As Tom says, the issue we were dealing with was the very reduced number of homes actually available. There comes a point when prioritisation becomes an unrealistic presentation for Londoners. A realistic talk of restriction and accepting that the limited supply does mean that prioritisation effectively is freezing out people who are not at the very highest top of the iceberg of a prioritisation category is actually the most realistic way of presenting the programme to Londoners. Our assessment was that it was more honest and more transparent to be clear about the very limited number of units we had coming through and what that meant for the number of Londoners we could assist in moving.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): We do not want to create false hope, as it were.

Emma Best AM: Perhaps putting some work into the scheme, there would be a way to engage more people and create more opportunities.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): A lot of work has gone into the scheme. It is simply a product of the housing crisis that we have at the moment that supply of properties is very restricted at the moment.

Emma Best AM: Talking of that supply, there has been a 54 per cent increase in the number of vacant homes since 2016 under the current Mayor compared with a 31 per cent reduction under the predecessor. Obviously, we know there is a nationwide trend around some of that, but the previous Mayor did use schemes such as the AHP in order to address that in part and bring that number of empty dwellings down. I know the current Mayor has asked - like he often does - for more powers from the Government, but perhaps there are some things that you could do, for example, using the CHAP to specifically target empty homes. That would also address not doing that double counting that you and Robert were talking about earlier. Is that something that you are actively looking into with that programme?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): As you have alluded to, the rate of empty homes has gone up across the country and London is still lowest.

Emma Best AM: I did allude to it so that you did not have to and so you could answer the question. Thank you.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Also, I would add that a large part of this increase has been delays in the court system, which of course have been caused by cuts from the Government, which mean properties spend much longer in probate. Unfortunately, that is not something the Mayor can influence. I can definitely take away and look at whether or not any of our funding could be used in this area.

I would note that there are powers for boroughs to take over empty properties, but they are extremely difficult to exercise, in part because when the Coalition Government [2010 – 2015] came in, it made harder to issue empty dwelling management orders by saying that the properties had to be linked to ASB.

I would also note that the previous Mayor when he was Mayor said that councils should be able to levy 1,000 per cent council tax on properties. I do not recall him introducing that when he was Prime Minister and actually had the power to do so.

Emma Best AM: Thanks, Tom. You agreed in there somewhere to answer the question and take it away and look at that. I am surprised it has not formed a bigger part of your thinking already. Would you be able --

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Sorry, what was that, Assembly Member Best?

Emma Best AM: I said you did commit to go away and look at focusing on empty homes. I was surprised that was not a bigger part of your thinking already.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Councils --

Emma Best AM: Could you perhaps write back to me with how you are going to look to incorporate that into the wider project?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): The other key point about this is that when we are bringing homes back in under CHAP --

Emma Best AM: Can you also look at the amount of the wheelchair accessible --

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): -- they have to meet the Decent Homes Standard --

Andrew Boff AM (Chair): Deputy Mayor, it will have to be a written reply because the Conservative Group is now out of time.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Very well.

Emma Best AM: Could you also give me the wheelchair accessible percentage of the CHAP as well, please, that you are aiming for?

Andrew Boff AM (Chair): Thank you.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): I am sure we can do that, although it is not --

Andrew Boff AM (Chair): Try to get one under the wire there, OK?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Sorry, yes.

Andrew Boff AM (Chair): All right. Assembly Member McCartney, please?

Joanne McCartney AM: Thank you. We know that there are over 300,000 households in London on local authority waiting lists. I am very glad that, as we have heard from the Deputy Mayor, this Mayor has started building council homes again at the highest rate since the 1970s. But of course, housing associations have a real role to play here.

Can I ask Alistair to start with, if I can? Looking at your recent strategic review, one of your challenges you identified - and I am going to quote this - is that "the Government has a significant control over our sector but no comprehensive long-term plan". What would you like to see from a long-term plan and what would that mean for London?

Alistair Smyth (Director of Policy and Research, National Housing Federation): Thank you. We have been making the case for a long-term plan to solve the housing crisis because we think it is a long-term issue. It is a long time in the making of breaking the housing market, in effect, and so it is going to take a long time to fix. That takes strategic planning, budgeting and so on.

We think that there are things that need to be done. First and foremost, we need the right level of capital grant funding in order to bring forward more affordable homes, particularly the most affordable tenure, social

rent, and so we need much higher grant levels. That is the same in terms of devolving grant funding from central Government to the GLA in order to enable that.

We desperately need a long-term and certain rent policy, ideally over ten years, inflation-linked, to give our members long-term certainty to invest in existing homes and to give them the financial capacity to invest in building new homes.

We certainly need better access for housing associations to building safety funding. So far, for social landlords with homes for social rent, housing associations have not been able to access that due to the viability bar that has been set by central Government. That needs to change. Access to that would enable housing associations to use their own finances in different ways to invest money instead into existing homes and into new homes.

There are many more things on the list, but those are some of the headline things that we think would enable our members to do more.

Joanne McCartney AM: Thank you. Then can I turn to Fiona Fletcher-Smith, if I can? If you had that long-term plan so that you did not have to continually bid for funding in very short-term rounds, what could the housing association sector deliver in London in terms of numbers of housing and how quickly could it be done, do you think?

Fiona Fletcher-Smith (Chair, G15 Group of Housing Associations in London): It is difficult to put specific numbers on it. One thing I would emphasise is that the housing market is important, but in order to build the number of homes we need, that long-term plan and Government regarding housing as part of the national infrastructure would help. We need to be taken out of the market slightly, in a way, because at the moment I have to be more or less self-sufficient financially, which means I build for sale. Therefore, I am a victim of the market when there is a downturn, which means I have no capacity to either invest in existing homes or build new while the market is in its current 'slough of despond', I suppose we will call it.

The certainty on rents means that we can borrow and therefore we can build and invest. That certainty on rents would be the big point I would pick out from what Alistair said. In the last ten years, the rent formula that was agreed was breached, basically, by Government on four occasions out of the last ten years, and on four of those occasions our rent was actually reduced, which makes it very difficult for us to plan or to have conversations with investors and lenders about us as a sector and the security of our sector. The biggest ask would be rents.

Joanne McCartney AM: Thank you. Can I turn to the Deputy Mayor? We talked about council housing. I am pleased that we are getting additional units, for example, in my boroughs of Enfield and Haringey. You talked earlier about the upcoming AHP having a higher percentage of homes for social rent. Could you just expand a little bit on that for me, very briefly, if you could?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Absolutely. We know from the evidence we have that social rented homes are the most needed in London because they are the most affordable. On this occasion there was alignment, perhaps for a change, between ourselves and the Secretary of State [for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities], who also wanted to see a greater proportion of the AHP delivered as social rent rather than, say, shared ownership or another intermediate form of tenure. Therefore, we have been able to reprofile the programme on that basis.

Of course, delivering social rented homes is considerably more expensive than delivering homes for shared ownership and that has had to be reflected in grant rates, and because the Secretary of State and the Government decided not to increase the overall pot of funding, therefore the overall target had to come down. That is why we are calling in the short term, and the Mayor is calling in the short term, for £2.2 billion of funding to get us back up to where we were at the beginning of the programme. Longer-term we need £4.9 billion a year, every year, in order to get us up to a point that matches the actual scale of need in London.

Joanne McCartney AM: Yes, and of course the Autumn Statement [22 November 2023] did not deliver what you asked for.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): No. It did not come anywhere near.

Joanne McCartney AM: Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

Andrew Boff AM (Chair): Assembly Member Sheikh, please. Thank you.

Sakina Sheikh AM: Thank you, Chair. I think by this stage of the Plenary we are probably drawing on comments that have been made already, so I welcome the opportunity to tie in some threads and move towards solutions. It is what we have been discussing but I think it is good to highlight as we come to the end.

Tom, Deputy Mayor, I come back to you. This is regarding what we have just been discussing in terms of rents and affordability in London and what it needs to be, especially a young person in London trying to save up to get on the housing ladder, but also just to survive the rental market. Obviously in London we are doing all we can to build the affordable homes that we desperately need. I think you have already made clear the numbers are on our side when you look at the AHP with our record-breaking start of 116,000 homes, but what do we need in terms of a long-term solution to the housing crisis in London in order to make private rental sector more affordable? Then also in the short term, what interventions can we make?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): The private rented sector specifically?

Sakina Sheikh AM: Yes.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): I think it needs to be a combination of giving us the power to introduce rent controls here, a rent freeze, certainly in the short term, which would save private tenants more than £3,000 over two years. But that has to be as part of a holistic approach, as I just set out in response to Assembly Member McCartney, delivering and funding the large amount of affordable housing that we need, which would take pressure off the private rented sector. There are a lot of people living in the private rented sector, supported by Housing Benefit, who traditionally would have been perhaps in social housing living on much lower rent. We do need to get to grips with the private rented sector bill. It makes no sense for £9 billion or £10 billion a year to go into the pockets of private landlords. Again, this comes back to my point about invest to save.

Sakina Sheikh AM: Absolutely. Thank you. Conor, I think you wanted to come in for this. Feel free to answer the question, and maybe in addition talk more broadly about the support that we can give renters who are facing the escalating costs of being in the private rental sector market.

Conor O'Shea (Policy and Public Affairs Manager, Generation Rent): I have addressed a number of those things in my earlier comments, but I just wanted to come back to that rent control point that was on earlier, and thank you all for shoehorning this one in.

We do live in a de facto system of rent control at the moment. There is a First-tier Tribunal which a tenant can go to, to say to their landlord, "I think you've asked me for too much rent", and the tribunal can assess whether that is true and reduce the amount that the landlord gives them. But this is a tribunal that is based upon a very loose definition of market rent and that is flawed for many reasons. Firstly, as it is a self-fulfilling prophecy these market rents keep driving themselves up, but secondly, we do not have very accurate data on rents. We do hope, as the Deputy Mayor referenced earlier, that the property portal that will come in as part of the Renters (Reform) Bill will actually implement a bit of this.

Some of the phenomena that were being discussed earlier in relation to rent control are phenomena that we are seeing already in London. The notion that people will hang on longer in properties that are inadequate for themselves, or for their family size or for their prospective family size, we are already seeing that. The churn in the private rented sector is lower than it has been before because people are scared of the open market because the rents are going through the roof. We are also seeing suburbanisation at huge rates, renters moving further and further away from where they were before because they are looking for anything affordable. This sort of metric proves that under our already failing system of spiralling unaffordability, there is scope to make an intervention.

Sakina Sheikh AM: Thank you for that, Conor. It really concerns me - we have been discussing this obviously in the Housing Committee as well - the distortion it can have on the demographics of London, whether that is age on either end, young people or older people, or in terms of wider inequality. The thing that makes London so brilliant, international and unique is its diversity and I think that the escalating rents and the housing crisis are beginning to distort the demographics of London.

I appreciate your comments this afternoon. I do not know if there are any closing comments from the panel before I pass back on to my colleagues. Fiona.

Fiona Fletcher-Smith (Chair, G15 Group of Housing Associations in London): For me the bottom line is that we need to build more social rented, because there are a lot of people housed in the private rented sector who genuinely need social housing. If we take that demand away from the private rented sector, we will have more affordability, inevitably.

Sakina Sheikh AM: Thank you. I will leave it there for now, Chair, unless anyone wanted to come in. I am happy to pass back to you.

Andrew Boff AM (Chair): Thank you. Assembly Member Clarke, please.

Anne Clarke AM: Thank you, Chair, and good afternoon to the panel. I am going to start with you, Fiona. Coming on to building safety, which we have not touched on much in this meeting so far, what more can we do to ensure building safety standards are adequate, that they are appropriate and that we keep Londoners safe?

Fiona Fletcher-Smith (Chair, G15 Group of Housing Associations in London): I think a lot has been done already and I will give a lot of credit to the Secretary of State, Michael Gove, in terms of his focus on this issue. It has been tremendous, and his help with those developers who have not been doing what they are

supposed to do has been wonderful. However, we do need some policy certainty. It has been mentioned earlier on the second staircase. It is not science-based. Understandably, it is based on a desire to do something, but that is not borne out by the science of buildings and how they work. I am also very concerned about retrofit and refurbishment and what the rules are on that. We are focusing tremendously on new build, but we will be doing a lot of work on making existing homes better, making sure that building control, manufacturers of the materials - who were very much highlighted in the Grenfell [Tower fire] issue - that they are controlled and monitored in lots of ways.

The final point I would make is that where there is uncertainty or where we are waiting for grant applications, there are residents who are psychologically feeling unsafe. Whether the buildings are unsafe or not is debateable, but they feel that it is unsafe while we wait for the Government to process claims for grants. Therefore, I would ask that the administration of all of that is speeded up as well.

Anne Clarke AM: Yes. That is certainly something we hear a lot about, residents who feel very unsafe and feel very uncertain, and then a lot of times that is accompanied with very high bills as well. Alistair.

Alistair Smyth (Director of Policy and Research, National Housing Federation): I just wanted to come in to expand on a point I mentioned briefly about building safety funding and viability for social landlords, so just to expand on that a bit more. As it stands, there is building safety remediation funding available centrally, but none of our members have been able to access it because as a social landlord, in order to access that, you have to demonstrate that effectively you are almost unviable as a business because of the extent of the building safety costs that you face, which is an odd conundrum. Because of that, none of our members yet have actually been able to access that.

We have been working on this point, writing to Ministers and talking to officials for some time, but we have not been able to achieve a change in that yet. We urgently need that. Some of our members in London, particularly our small- to medium-sized members, are being disproportionately affected by this, and it is creating a significant issue in terms of their ability to have money to invest in other homes and services. They are rightly prioritising building safety, but that is having a negative effect on what else they are able to do.

Anne Clarke AM: That is a real worry, that your members are not able to access the funding that should be available to them. Tom, coming to you, is there anything we can do to support those builders that are struggling to get that money?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): We are obviously working very hard with the cladding remediation fund that we have, the Social and Private Sector Cladding Remediation Funds, and the Building Safety Fund. Our Building Safety Team works very closely with responsible entities to try to make sure that buildings are remediated as swiftly as possible. There are issues relating to this transition to the Responsible Actors Scheme, which was created by Michael Gove, who I have to say - I do not often say nice things about him, but I will agree with Fiona - did move forward the building safety agenda and the support that was made available, so I will say that. There is this crossover with the Responsible Actors Scheme where schemes leave our funds and are taken on by the developer to remediate themselves, but obviously that can sometimes cause issues and delays.

Anne Clarke AM: Yes. Speaking of delays, we have a lot of talk about second staircases and the delay in certainty. It is that delay of certainty that seems to be causing problems. Basically put, what is the impact on housebuilding in London owing to that delay?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Due to the uncertainty around second staircases, there are 34,000 homes, that we are aware of, in limbo in the planning system in London. There will be more than that because obviously this is only schemes that are referred to us. There will be other schemes that only the boroughs see that are delayed. It is the biggest single thing delaying development at the moment, and I am afraid I will now have to revert from saying something nice about Michael Gove to saying something less nice about Michael Gove. This whole thing has been handled in an incredibly chaotic and haphazard way. You cannot just stand up as Secretary of State in a speech and put out a lower threshold as a throwaway remark without providing the technical details behind that, without causing huge delays for the sector, even though in principle we, of course, are in favour of the higher standards of fire safety.

Robert Colville (Director, Centre for Policy Studies): Can I just come in quickly?

Anne Clarke AM: Yes.

Robert Colville (Director, Centre for Policy Studies): There is also an element here, which is very simply that even once these schemes are built, the second staircase reduces very significantly the amount of housing you can have on it. I think it is a 15 per cent reduction in the amount of housing that a given site can deliver, so you are getting 15 per cent fewer houses for every building you put up, which seems insane.

Anne Clarke AM: Right.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): It will probably lead to taller buildings in certain locations because in order to make up, in viability terms, extra storeys will need to be added on to make the building more economical.

Robert Colville (Director, Centre for Policy Studies): It basically becomes very hard to build, for example, mansion blocks now because you would have to put two staircases in and suddenly it just does not work. You would have to go to 20 storeys rather than eight or ten.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Absolutely right. You will get more blocks of, say, five storeys and more blocks of 20 storeys and fewer blocks of ten storeys, for example. That would be my assessment.

Anne Clarke AM: OK. Finally, from me -- Sem, did you have another question? I am just worried about time.

Sem Moema AM: It has been covered.

Anne Clarke AM: It has been covered? OK. I am interested in your view on this, Mr O'Shea. What can we do to protect Londoners who fear complaining about the state of their flat or the conditions of their flat because they are worried about risk of eviction?

Conor O'Shea (Policy and Public Affairs Manager, Generation Rent): The biggest thing is to remove section 21 'no fault' evictions. That is universal across the panel here that we have seen today. They absolutely have to go because then a tenant can turn to a landlord without fear of being removed from their home and say, "Look, this window needs fixing, this boiler needs fixing", whatever it might be.

Something was raised to me recently that may be of use at a local authority level, which is that written warnings to landlords that do not have any enforcement action or anything tangible attached to them do often cause problems for tenants, in as much as this warning will tip off a local authority that a tenant has been speaking about a concern, and then comes the section 21. That might be something to think about at a more local level. Thank you.

Anne Clarke AM: Tom, did you have anything to add to that?

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): Nothing further to add.

Anne Clarke AM: Nothing further? I have a minute left. Alistair.

Alistair Smyth (Director of Policy and Research, National Housing Federation): No, sorry.

Anne Clarke AM: Gosh, a minute. Is there anything anyone else would like to add that they have not had a chance to do so?

Robert Colville (Director, Centre for Policy Studies): Just very quickly on the section 21 stuff, there is the issue that you do need to sort the tribunals first. That is actually a real issue with this, which is what is holding it up. At the moment the tribunal system is completely log-jammed and if you add everyone who has an issue with their tenant into that and the delays get even longer, the risk is that people will not put their houses on the market because they will be worried they will not be able to get the tenant out if, for example, they go overseas for work for a year and then want to come back. There are actual concerns about this. It is not just the Government being stupid.

Conor O'Shea (Policy and Public Affairs Manager, Generation Rent): What I would say on that --

Anne Clarke AM: Very quickly.

Conor O'Shea (Policy and Public Affairs Manager, Generation Rent): There is a very small percentage of cases that ever reach the courts when it comes to evictions, and we do not expect that changing under [the abolishment of] section 21.

Anne Clarke AM: Fifteen seconds, Tom.

Tom Copley (Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development): I just wanted to come back, if I can come back on anything, on the Berkeley Homes development that was mentioned earlier. We work very closely with Berkeley Homes. They are involved in the Housing Delivery Taskforce. I think we have some issues with that report in that it does not separate out the London Plan policies from national building regulations in terms of its calculations. I was not able to make that point earlier. I am making it now.

Anne Clarke AM: Thank you so much.

Andrew Boff AM (Chair): Thank you very much. Thank you. We have now reached the end of the question-and-answer session. I would like to thank all the guests for this session. I know it is a long time, but I think you can gather that all the Assembly Members think this is extraordinarily important issue for London, so thank you for coming today and answering our questions. You are now free to leave.