

## Motion 1 - Tackling London's housing crisis

### The vision

In order to live their lives to the full, Conference believes that every Londoner deserves a decent and affordable home that supports their choices and meets their needs, and the security to know that no one can take it away from them.

Conference believes that the key step to achieving this vision is to put in place an ambitious, long-term plan to boost the supply of new housing across the capital, to accommodate its growing population and retain its international competitiveness – beginning to tackle entrenched issues such as homelessness, affordability and overcrowding in the process.

Conference therefore notes the challenge below, and calls upon elected Liberal Democrats, candidates and campaigners to work towards building a plan, guided by the key elements listed below, to help tackle London's housing crisis:

### The challenge

Conference notes that London's population has increased by 600,000 since 2008 and is now **expected** to reach 9 million by 2020, and 10 million by 2030 – leaving the city facing the challenge of building 50,000 new homes a year, every year, for the next 20 years simply in order to meet existing demand.

Conference further notes that:

- 255,729 households – or over 500,000 people – are currently on local authority housing waiting lists across London.
- 17,530 families were accepted as homeless and in priority need by London councils in 2014/15.
- 48,240 homeless London households are currently living in temporary accommodation, including 37,680 families with children.
- More than 1 in 10 London households (11.3%) are currently living in overcrowded conditions.
- The average house price in London is now £481,820, compared to £181,619 across England and Wales.
- On average, house prices are more than 14 times the average London salary (£33,130), while private rents account for 53% of gross earnings.
- In 2014, one in nine London households and one in three private renters had lived in their current home for less than a year.
- Around 22% of homes in London are below the official "Decent Homes" standard.

In addition, conference notes the Conservative Government's proposal to extend the Right to Buy to 1.3 million Housing Association tenants.

Conference is concerned that the way the extension of the Right to Buy policy is to be funded – through forcing local councils to sell off their most valuable properties – may result in many new council properties being sold off almost as soon as they are built, instead of being let to local residents in housing need.

Conference therefore believes that the proposal to extend the Right to Buy to Housing Association tenants in London risks undermining other efforts to increase the supply of new affordable homes across the capital.

### **Key elements of the plan**

As part of the plan to tackle London's housing crisis, Liberal Democrats will campaign and lobby for the implementation of the following proposals:

#### **Assessment of housing needs**

- the evidence base for the Mayor's Housing Strategy to include full equality impact assessments of all housing policies and other proposals adopted (including those outlined in this motion), and such to be published. The 'winners' and 'losers' of any changes should be clear, and the information acted upon.
- investigate options to encourage downsizing where appropriate, ensuring that better quality homes are always available to people.

#### **Housing investment**

- the Greater London Authority to fund a large scale home-building initiative; affordable home-building should be doubled with £2 billion of extra investment, financed by converting the Olympic precept into an affordable housing precept at no extra cost to taxpayers.

#### **Planning changes**

- introduce a new land-use class category for Affordable Housing to enable local authorities to protect land for that purpose, ensuring developers are clear from the outset what is acceptable in planning terms.
- ensure local authorities are clear about and publish their targets for "affordable housing" (and what that phrase means) and how far they meet this target.
- require local authorities to publish developers' financial viability assessments, which are often used to reduce the level of "affordable housing" in a development below locally agreed targets.
- change the law to give individuals the right of appeal to the Secretary of State (DCLG) in those cases where financial viability assessments are inappropriately used to seek a reduction in the amount of "affordable housing" that a local authority's policy would otherwise require.
- ensure local authorities have a clear policy on social housing.
- change planning policy to ensure surplus public sector land is used, wherever possible, to support local needs such as providing new schools, affordable homes and health centres.

#### **Fiscal changes**

- devolve the full suite of property taxes (council tax, business rates, stamp duty land tax etc) to London government, together with responsibility for setting tax rates and authority over all matters including revaluation, banding and discounts, as recommended by the London Finance Commission.

- review property and council taxes, with a view to removing any tax incentives handed out to investor buyers to help make London's homes more affordable for owner occupiers.

### **Public Land**

- give local community groups the right to bid for public sector land or buildings left unused or unoccupied for more than two years.
- speed up plans for a London Land Commission and establish a London Public Land Register to identify all public sector land available for development.

### **Empty Homes**

- offer grants and interest-free loans to owners of long-term empty properties that require renovation.
- encourage councils to use Compulsory Purchase (CPO) powers to bring long-term empty properties back into use where all other attempts have failed.
- ensure all councils make use of new powers to charge up to 50% extra council tax on properties that have been left empty and unfurnished for over two years.

### **Home Ownership**

- introduce a new 'Rent to Own' model where monthly payments steadily accrue the tenant a percentage stake in a new property, enabling them to own it outright after 30 years.
- Investigate and develop other models of alternative routes to home ownership.

### **Private Rented Sector**

- launch a 'Know Your Rights' campaign with the aim of ensuring all London's private renters are aware of their new and existing rights to demand a safe, secure and habitable home without fear of being evicted by their landlord.
- introduce longer, fixed term, family-friendly tenancies (of two years or longer) to provide greater security, certainty and lower costs.
- ensure councils use the full range of enforcement powers at their disposal – including 'selective licensing' – to tackle the problem of rogue landlords.

### **Homelessness**

- increase the amount of accommodation for people moving on from emergency hostels, reducing variation in provision across different boroughs .
- improve coordination with other services, such as the NHS, to ensure that homeless people who suffer from mental health problems and alcohol or drug-dependency, are provided with better support.