

Greater Manchester Combined Authority

Date: 12 July 2024
Subject: GMCA Overview & Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Report on Affordable Living
Report of: Councillor Lewis Nelson, Chair of the Task and Finish Group and Councillor Nadim Muslim, Chair of the GMCA Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Purpose of Report

To inform the Combined Authority of the recent task and finish exercise undertaken by the GMCA Overview & Scrutiny Committee in relation to Affordable Living, its key recommendations and next steps.

Recommendations:

The GMCA is requested to:

1. Endorse the full list of recommendations within the report.
2. Seek opportunities where the GMCA can support the delivery of the recommendations, specifically -
 - to influence the development of the next Affordable Homes Programme through strengthened partnership arrangements within the latest devolution deal to ensure it is flexible enough to meet the needs of our residents (Recommendation 1).
 - to continue to support Local Authorities to seek out potential schemes through innovative approaches and bold actions (Recommendation 1).
 - to support Local Authorities and Housing Providers to ensure tenants have full access to welfare and other hardship funds through every interaction (Recommendation 2).

- to co-design the next GM Housing Strategy with other key stakeholders that builds on what is already being done, but also confidently pushes the boundaries as to what can potentially be done, setting the standard as zero carbon (Recommendation 3).
 - to ensure that advice on cost-of-living support (e.g. food and fuel bill support) provided through registered providers is also available via private landlords (Recommendation 7).
 - to ensure that being an accredited member of the Good Landlord Charter is universally recognised, with its unique benefits clearly identified (Recommendation 8).
 - As a first step, GMCA to organise an event to discuss the findings of this review and actions which can be taken to remove barriers for the delivery of viable schemes (Recommendation 10).
3. Note that this report will now be shared with GM Local Authority Councillors, Cabinet Members for Housing and Scrutiny Committees for their information and appropriate action.

Contact Officers

Nicola Ward, Statutory Scrutiny Officer, GMCA Nicola.ward@greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk

Number of attachments to the report: 1

1. Background

Everybody in Greater Manchester deserves a place to call home but fundamentally, there is not enough housing stock for all people in Greater Manchester

The task and finish group began their review by exploring the factors that make-up an 'affordable home'. They concluded that system defined 'affordable housing' does not always translate to what is truly affordable for residents.

They acknowledged that the monthly rent/mortgage payment figure cannot alone define 'affordable housing'. Housing costs are usually the biggest outgoing for residents, followed

by energy and food; all of which have risen considerably in recent years. Therefore, the review widened its scope to address how we can collectively enable our residents to achieve affordable living.

Throughout the process, the group investigated case studies and approaches that have already unlocked development and are delivering impressive results across Greater Manchester. There are examples of local best practice that provide replicable blueprints however in order to replicate them in multiple areas, we need an effective partnership approach supported by national government to ensure we have the resources and tools to deliver.

This review is not a conclusive assessment of the housing landscape across Greater Manchester but sets out the findings of the task and finish group which are hoped to foremost further highlight the issues relating to affordable living and offer some helpful recommendations to address these.

2. Recommendations

1. **Bold, national action for the creation of more affordable homes with greater flexibility as a region to ensure that the housing market can line up with affordability of residents in GM. Recognising that the formula for affordable living is multi-faceted and should include rent, energy, and essential food costs.**
 - GMCA to influence the development of the next Affordable Homes Programme through strengthened partnership arrangements within the latest devolution deal to ensure it is flexible enough to meet the needs of our residents.
 - Homes England to use their role as an enabler to provide additional funding to complex but viable schemes.
 - GMCA to continue to support Local Authorities to seek out potential schemes through innovative approaches and bold actions.
2. **Move towards supporting people out of debt at every point of contact, ensuring a minimum standard of welfare advisors to support residents to access unclaimed welfare support and begin their tenancies with no deficit.**

- Government to recognise the impact of debt on access to housing and successful tenancies and ensure that there is a minimum level of welfare support provided to all residents and the appropriate training to ensure this resource is sustainable.
- Local Authorities and Housing Providers to ensure tenants have full access to welfare and other hardship funds through every interaction.

3. A GM Housing Strategy that is ambitious enough to deliver what is needed to meet the housing needs of residents in Greater Manchester, including the ambition for all new homes to be zero carbon, enabled by long term partnerships that have the ability to deliver more collaboratively.

- All Housing Providers to engage with the Housing Provider Partnership and Strategic Place Partnership so that they can challenge one another to unlock more potential sites through a strong partnership approach.
- GMCA to co-design the next GM Housing Strategy with other key stakeholders that builds on what is already being done, but also confidently pushes the boundaries as to what can potentially be done, setting the standard as zero carbon.

4. Clear narrative about what we are trying to achieve collectively, whilst recognising the individual needs of each GM Local Authority, potentially through a GM shared housing allocations framework that sets a standard but allows for local interpretation that supports Local Authorities to manage their available housing stock.

- GM Local Authorities alongside the GM Housing Providers Group to consider the development of a shared housing allocations framework, recognising the need for local interpretation but valuing the shared standard.

5. Flexibility of funding and more ability to joint commission across partner agencies to ensure that supported housing is adaptable and built for future needs.

- Homes England and commissioners in localities to ensure that funding streams are flexible enough to allow for joint commissioning, especially of supported and

specialist housing.

- Local Authority Planning Teams to consider how new developments can most effectively be built for future population changes.

6. Levers of Places for Everyone should ensure that social and affordable rented homes are included in every new development.

- Local Authorities to follow the Places for Everyone lead and ensure that their Local Plans specify the percentage of social and affordable rented homes required within each new development.

7. Effective promotion of the support available to local residents to assist with energy bills, insulation, food provision etc in recognition of the need to see housing as just one element of affordable living.

- GMCA to ensure that advice on cost-of-living support (e.g. food and fuel bill support) provided through registered providers is also available via private landlords.
- Local Authorities to ensure that this advice is provided to residents at all points of contact i.e. benefit support, council tax enquiries etc.

8. Creation of a national housing minimum standard for all private rental properties in order to remove any detrimental health outcomes of poor living conditions, driven by the recognised benefits of being an accredited member of the Good Landlord Charter.

- GMCA to ensure that being an accredited member of the Good Landlord Charter is universally recognised, with its unique benefits clearly identified.
- Government to use the learning from Greater Manchester's Good Landlord Charter as a starting point for ensuring a minimum standard for private rented properties.

9. An increase in revenue funding in line with the increasing support needs of residents to reduce demand on the wider care system, but allocated to organisations who are meeting people where they are.

- Government to recognise the growth in additional support required by tenants that is

often best met through the voluntary sector or housing providers, and that this needs to be effectively resourced to minimise the cost to acute services.

10. An annual GM Strategic Place Partnership event with key planning influencers (elected members and officers) to begin to break down any planning barriers to viable schemes and to hold further conversations regarding capacity and required expertise.

- As a first step, GMCA to organise an event to discuss the findings of this review and actions which can be taken to remove barriers for the delivery of viable schemes.