



## RESPONSE TO 'A CITY FOR ALL LONDONERS' DECEMBER 2016

### INTRODUCTION:

Stonewall Housing has existed since 1983 to provide housing advice, advocacy and support, and to influence housing policy and practice, in order to secure safe accommodation for lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people.

Most of our callers are experiencing homophobic, biphobic or transphobic harassment, abuse or violence where they live.

Stonewall Housing's advice and support services back-up the Mayor's report when it explains that these are challenging times for Londoners. We support LGBT people from every London borough. The greatest number of cases again this year were 25-35 year olds (46% up from 28% in 2014/15) reflecting the shrinking assistance for this age group and the continuing impacts of benefits changes. We have seen a steady growth in people aged over 55, 78% identify as BME, 50% identify as having a disability and 18% of our services users identify as trans (up from 8% last year).

Stonewall Housing continues to be a distributor of vouchers for foodbanks across London and welfare funds for Terrence Higgins Trust, Buttle Trust and London Catalyst Samaritan Grant. In 2015-16, despite a break in issuing grants by some fund accounts, Stonewall Housing still assisted 49 clients to access about £4,000 in additional welfare grant support.

Stonewall Housing welcomes this ambitious plan to meet the needs of all Londoners. However, we believe that in order to meet the needs of LGBT Londoners the Mayor of London will need to better understand their specific needs and aspirations. Also, to achieve his ambitious plans, the Mayor of London should engage with and support LGBT and other Voluntary Sector Organisations.

### LGBT NEED:

Any plan for London should be based on evidence of need. However, many regional and local strategies in London are based on very little evidence of the needs of LGBT people because local authorities and providers do not collect data on sexual orientation or gender identity, or LGBT people do not trust the organisations to handle the information sensitively so fail to disclose their identities.

LGBT voluntary sector organisations, such as Stonewall Housing, hold a quantitative and qualitative body of evidence which is invaluable to show the needs for our communities.

The information we have gathered was used in the Trust for London-funded report 'Still Out There' (2016) which showed that for 1/3 of LGBT people ensuring safety at home is a constant or significant challenge and social isolation was a significant issue as well as financial hardship, with 35% earning less than £15,000 per annum.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission's 'Review of Evidence on Inequality for LGBT groups' (2016) found little robust research about LGBT housing issues but what was done showed increased risk of homelessness with the most prolific causes being harassment and abuse and LGBT people experience and expect discriminatory practices from housing services, who do not address their needs adequately.

Stonewall Housing's Finding Safe Spaces Report (2015) worked with local No Second Night Out projects to collect experiences and then train their staff about LGBT issues. The report showed LGBT rough sleepers were avoiding and not being picked up by mainstream homelessness outreach and support services. 'A City for all Londoners' rightly describes the 'intolerable scars' of rough sleeping. The Mayor needs to take a new direction to address the specific needs of particular groups to tackle rough sleeping within the LGBT communities, for instance.

If the Mayor is serious about tackling the housing crisis then he will need to increase the supply of affordable social housing and address the inadequate, unaffordable, poorly managed private rented sector, while protecting against national policies that will impact on London. The uncertainty about the future funding of supported housing and further welfare reforms may impact on where young people can afford to live and many more Londoners may have even fewer housing options in the future.

Almost 10% of callers to Stonewall Housing's advice line have experienced domestic abuse and 28% reported their housing problem was related to their gender identity or sexual orientation. All shared housing should be managed well to reduce the incidents of anti-social behaviour experienced by LGBT people, and therefore the Mayor should be more directive about what local private landlord licensing schemes include.

The information that Stonewall Housing and other LGBT groups collect should inform the range of policies that the Mayor will be drafting in the coming months since, as the report rightly points out, no policy should operate in a 'silo'. Housing, community safety and health cannot be considered exclusively if we want to tackle LGBT people's isolation or if we want them to achieve their full potential.

## **LGBT SERVICES:**

The 'City for all Londoners' report comes at a crucial time for the LGBT voluntary and community sector and the communities we serve. In 2015/16 two long-standing LGBT charities, Broken Rainbow and Pace, closed without warning and many remain under threat. Many LGBT business and social venues have closed and there are fewer safe spaces where can meet safely.

Stonewall Housing's clients' experiences were used in the Trust for London-funded report 'Still Out There' (2016) which showed that the majority of LGBT people were not able to access specialist services locally.

This report explains that strong communities are needed in order to tackle inequality and promote social inclusion and it also aims to set out where the Mayor can take a leadership role across the city. With LGBT people living in small numbers in different locations,

Stonewall Housing believes the Mayor has a key role to play in helping the LGBT communities to develop their own solutions in either supporting them to develop specific services or supporting collaborative commissioning at a local level. For example, the lack of housing choices for older LGBT people means that many have to go back into the closet and not receive the personalised care and support that they need, which has a detrimental

effect on their mental health. Stonewall Housing is currently working with social entrepreneurs, public bodies and other voluntary organisations to deliver the first LGBT-specific accommodation for older LGBT people in the city, but to do so we need to support of the Mayor.

Other services that should be considered as part of the Mayor's future strategies, include refuge provision which is in very short supply for LGBT people who experience domestic abuse, safe housing for LGBT asylum seekers and refugees and the development of community spaces that may be linked with specific housing developments to ensure LGBT communities and groups have safe spaces to meet and interact.

#### **VOLUNTARY SECTOR COLLABORATION:**

The 'City for all Londoners' report shows how the Mayor aims to work with others through the Homes for Londoners Board and the London Health Board, but these examples do not mention the involvement of the voluntary sector, who have a vital role to play, especially since they can share a perspective of the experiences of disadvantaged and marginalised groups. The LGBT Sector and the wider voluntary sector can assist the Mayor to develop the strategies and the Equality Framework that will inform these strategies. The sectors can also support him in reviewing the success of these strategies.

Stonewall Housing would suggest that the Mayor revives the Housing and Equality Standing Group, which supported previous Mayors in writing and monitoring the equality impact of their housing strategies.

Bob Green, CEO of Stonewall Housing, also chairs the London Voluntary Sector Forum. This forum is based at the London Voluntary Service Council which is facing funding challenges following the ending of London Councils capacity building funding. The Mayor has a leadership role to play to work with London Funders in progressing their Way Ahead Report to ensure charities continue to receive the support they need to survive and thrive to meet the needs of all Londoners.

#### **LGBT VOLUNTARY SECTOR SUSTAINABILITY:**

LGBT people may have fewer family and support networks and many access LGBT-specific services rather than mainstream organisations.

As mentioned above, Broken Rainbow and Pace closed during the past year. Stonewall Housing won a tender for its supported housing services in 2015, but at a much reduced price, which meant that 4 posts had to be made redundant. During a time when more people with more complex needs are contacting LGBT organisations for advice and support, many organisations are facing closure or having to reduce their services. This is underlined by recent research by Nat Cen and Unison (Implications of reductions to public spending for LGB and T people and services' Nov 2016).

LGBT Consortium are working with a number of LGBT organisations and City Bridge Trust and Trust for London to consider ways of supporting the sector in London. The Mayor also has a leadership role to play to ensure these vital services continue. The 'City for all Londoners' talks a lot about 'good growth' but if the LGBT voluntary sector fails to grow then LGBT people will not benefit but will face further disadvantage.