

Providing accommodation for essential staff in South East London - a protocol

2
edition

Why have a protocol ?

The first protocol between the NHS and SE London boroughs was produced in 2001. This was the first protocol of its kind and was heralded as a break through in joint working between the NHS and local authorities. The protocol established a basis for joint working in SE London that is still in place.

On occasion it has avoided time consuming and unnecessary conflicts between local authorities and NHS Trusts about new accommodation. In particular in SE London the protocol's reference to standards and affordability meant the development of a number of new schemes that are popular with key workers due to their affordable housing costs and high standards. Because the protocol has served to provide clear guidelines to housing associations and other

agencies, SE London may largely avoid the prospect of unpopular and expensive key worker housing schemes that fail to contribute to staff recruitment and retention. The protocol has underpinned a SE London key worker housing strategy and has been an important reference point for agencies such as housing associations that may be planning to provide accommodation for essential staff or key workers.

Introduction

This protocol sets out a commitment by the SE London Strategic Health Authority, public sector Health and Social Care Employers in SE London and the London Boroughs of Lambeth, Southwark, Lewisham, Greenwich, Bexley and Bromley to work collaboratively in order to provide suitable accommodation for essential workers in SE London.

The protocol is based on the following premise:

There is a direct link between the provision of local public services such as Health and the provision of suitable accommodation for essential workers. Though lack of accommodation may not be the main or only reason why public services are experiencing difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff, we perceive that increased provision of affordable and quality accommodation for such staff will assist recruitment and staff retention. In turn, improvements in staff recruitment and retention can be expected to lead to improvements in public services.

Addressing needs

- The NHS organisations and local authorities will continue to pool and share information in order to provide up-to-date assessments of the need for key worker accommodation.
- Local authorities, and the SE London Housing Partnership, will address key worker housing issues in their Housing Strategies.

Development partners

- Local authorities will provide advice and assistance to NHS organisations that are seeking to select housing associations, or possibly other types of providers, to provide accommodation for essential staff.

Sites for new developments

- All parties undertake to share information about planned or proposed developments of accommodation for key workers.



- NHS organisations and local authorities will liaise closely to ensure that different affordable housing schemes are not unnecessarily or unknowingly competing for the same sites for new development.
- Local authorities will include proposals from housing associations for staff or key worker accommodation in their site registration arrangements.
- Local authorities regard staff or key worker accommodation as an acceptable form of intermediate housing in mixed tenure housing developments.

Section 106 Agreements

- Developer proposals to use key worker housing to meet the entire affordable housing obligation of a section 106 site will not be pursued unless local authority advice is that this would be acceptable.
- All local authorities require a combination of social rented accommodation and intermediate housing through section 106 agreements.
- Though the intermediate category is not exclusive to key worker accommodation, local authorities will, subject to negotiation, accept key worker housing for all or part of the 'intermediate housing' requirement of section 106 agreements.
- Key worker housing provided through section 106 agreements is subject to the standards and affordability levels described in this protocol.

Standards

- All new schemes will achieve Housing Corporation Scheme Development Standards (e.g. *Eco Homes 'Very Good'*), Secure by Design and other best practice in design.
- All new housing will be provided to Lifetime Homes standards and consideration will be given to provision of wheelchair units.
- Appropriate levels of parking will be provided, in particular to cater for staff that may work shifts.
- Hostel or HMO type schemes are discouraged. Sharing of self – contained flats is recognised as a more sustainable model of accommodation but schemes based on sharing of self contained accommodation need to be based on thorough assessments of demand and affordability.
- Private sector providers are encouraged to develop new key worker accommodation provided these standards and the affordability criteria (below) are complied with.



Affordability

The parties to this protocol work on the basis that:

- Affordability is determined by income levels and not by relation to market values.
- Staff would not spend more than 30% of their disposable income on the housing costs associated with rented accommodation. Housing costs include service charges, not just rent.
- Most NHS staff earn less than £25,000 per annum
- Staff on lower levels of income have more difficulty in accessing affordable accommodation and are therefore the primary target group.

In 2005-6 a Nurse Grade D has an annual salary of £21871 - £23732 (Grade D is the most used Grade for nurses and this its mid range). After deductions the nurse has a disposable income of no more than £16,600 i.e. a maximum weekly disposable income of £319. The nurse can afford to spend 30% of the weekly disposable income on her housing costs (rent + service charges) – i.e. £95 per week.

- Therefore, for example, a one bedroomed flat would not be regarded as affordable if its rent level was higher than in the region of £80-£100 per week.
- Local authorities will work closely with housing associations and the Housing Corporation to ensure that shared ownership and other forms of low cost home ownership are affordable to key worker households on average or typical salaries.

Marketing and referrals

- In order to offer the greatest possible choice to essential workers and to reduce the risk of low take up, organisations that have use of accommodation that is exclusive are encouraged to enter into reciprocal arrangements. This allows for referrals of different categories of key workers and or referrals to be pooled between different employers.
- Local authorities and NHS organisations will work with Zone Agents to maximise the effectiveness of advice and publicity for key workers seeking accommodation.
- Public sector Health and Social Care employers may advise local authorities and housing associations about how the marketing of shared ownership and other forms of low cost home ownership can be effectively targeted at their employees.

Communication and monitoring

- NHS organisations and local authorities will provide named contacts that will be kept on the website of the SE London Housing Partnership (**www.selondonhousing.org**)
- Local authorities convene liaison meetings on a quarterly basis.
- Local authorities will monitor the take up of key worker accommodation and make this information available to NHS organisations.



Glossary

Eco Homes – sustainability standards devised by the Building Research Establishment and expressed as different levels. The level of Very Good is one below that of the top level of Excellent and involves very high standards of energy efficiency and use of sustainable materials.

Essential staff – those public sector workers for whom recruitment and retention will be improved by the provision of affordable accommodation. This implies a wider definition than that for “key workers” below. This definition could include staff working on temporary contracts or through agency staff from overseas. It could also include manual and clerical staff.

HMO – house in multiple occupation. Frequently with shared facilities these are dwellings subject to licensing by local authorities.

Housing Corporation – the government body responsible for providing funding to housing associations and other providers to provide affordable housing in line with the London Housing Strategy. In London the Housing Corporation will be responsible for the administration of at least £403m worth of funding towards key worker housing in 2006-8. The Housing Corporation is also responsible for regulating housing associations.

Intermediate housing – housing that is ‘between’ social rented housing and market housing i.e. for which the cost of renting is higher than Council or housing association rents but for the cost of renting or purchase is lower than private market.

Key workers – those eligible for assistance under Government programmes. The Government definition that applies to the ‘Key Worker Living’ programme includes nurses, teachers, police officers, probation officers, prison officers and local authority planners.

Lifetime Homes – a set of 17 requirements produced by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation that ensure new homes are generally accessible and can be reasonably easily adapted to meet different needs. They are not a substitute for fully wheelchair accessible homes. The London Plan proposes that all new homes in London be to Lifetime Homes standards.

NHS organisations – the SE London Strategic Health Authority or any body that succeeds it + providers including Hospital Trusts, Foundation Trusts and Primary Care Trusts and any other public body responsible for the provision of Health or Social Care services to residents of SE London.

SE London Housing Partnership (SELHP) – a grouping of Bexley, Bromley, Greenwich, Lewisham and Southwark that works jointly on housing issues as one of 5 “sub regions” in London. Lambeth is part of the SW London Housing sub region but joint working with SELHP is well established.

Section 106 Agreements – legal agreements between developers of new property and local authority planning departments specifying the obligations to developers that arise from receiving planning consent. The obligation to provide affordable housing to achieve ‘mixed and balanced communities’ is a normal requirement of any development of more than 15 homes.

Secure by Design – standards on which the Metropolitan Police may advise to ensure that new homes are not vulnerable to crime.

Zone Agent – agency (*normally a housing association*) appointed by government to be responsible for overall marketing of new homes produced by the government’s Key Worker Living programme. The Zone Agent for SE London is currently Tower Homes. The Zone Agent acts as a ‘one stop shop’ for key workers wishing to purchase or rent accommodation provided through the Key Worker Living programme.



Useful links

South East London Housing Partnership
www.selondonhousing.org

Key Worker Living
www.keyworkerliving.co.uk

Tower Homes
www.towerhomes.org.uk

Housing Corporation
www.housingcorp.gov.uk

The protocol was reviewed and revised in 2005.