

Five minute briefing

Social Housing Green Paper: A new deal for social housing August 2018

Introduction

The Government published its long-awaited [Social Housing Green Paper](#) on Tuesday 14 August 2018. It has been described as setting out a “*vision which values and respects the voices of residents, with landlords treating them with decency and respect, backed up with clear consequences when they do not*”. It states that the Grenfell Tower fire “*brought the significance of social housing to the attention of the nation*” and that the tragedy “*must mark a turning point in how the country thinks and talks about social housing*.” A consultation seeking views on the proposals for the future of social housing and consisting of 48 questions, has been launched alongside the Green Paper. We will be submitting a response by the 6 November deadline.

The Government asserts that the proposals in this Green Paper “*present the opportunity to look afresh at the regulatory framework*” and have published a [Call for Evidence](#), which seeks views on how the current regulatory framework is operating. The Government also announced it is [consulting](#) on how local authorities spend Right to Buy receipts, in particular around not requiring them to make a payment in respect of their vacant high value council homes.

Key principles

The Green Paper is underpinned by five key principles:

1. A **safe and decent home** which is fundamental to a sense of security and our ability to get on in life
2. Improving and speeding up how **complaints are resolved**
3. **Empowering residents** and ensuring their voices are heard so that landlords are held to account
4. **Tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities**, challenging the stereotypes that exist about residents and their communities
5. **Building the social homes that we need** and ensuring that those homes can act as a springboard to home ownership

The following sections explore each of the five key principles in further detail.

Ensuring homes are safe and decent

Within this proposal, the Government will:

- Develop a new programme to support residents to engage with landlords on issues concerning building safety
 - Establish a pilot with a small group of landlords to trial options for engaging with residents on safety issues
 - Review the Decent Homes Standard to ensure “*it is demanding enough and delivers the right standards for social housing*” and update it “*to better reflect the Government’s current and forthcoming priorities*.”
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Effective resolution of complaints

The Green Paper emphasises that residents “*should have a stronger voice to influence decisions and challenge their landlords to improve performance*.” Residents “*must also be able to access good complaints processes, as well as swift and effective redress where appropriate*.” To achieve this, the Government proposes that it will:

- Improve access to the Housing Ombudsman for social housing residents, including the removal of a “*democratic filter*” stage and helping to ensure that the “*designated person*” better understands their role
- Consider launching an awareness campaign to support residents to understand their rights to seek redress and know how to make complaints and escalate them where necessary
- Seek to better understand whether more residents need to be able to access independent advice in making a complaint, options considered include increasing awareness of the existing advisory services or the creation of a single advisory service
- Speed up the landlords’ complaints process, with one option being considered is for the Regulator of Social Housing to set out a more specific timescale in a Code of Practice

Empowering residents and strengthening the Regulator

The performance of landlords will be assessed according to “*agreed and meaningful key performance indicators*”, annually published by the Regulator. These indicators will be focused on issues including:

- Keeping the property in good repair
- Maintaining the safety of buildings
- Effectively handling complaints
- Respectfully and helpfully engaging with residents
- Managing the neighbourhood responsibly, including addressing anti-social behaviour

As part of this principle, the Government is considering the following:

- introducing a “*consistent approach*” to complaints, whereby landlords report their complaint handling outcomes
 - whether key performance indicators should be used to inform/ influence landlords receiving funding
 - linking Affordable Homes Programme funding to the Regulator’s governance and viability ratings
 - whether performance indicators could be used to develop requirements for future strategic partnerships
 - ways of ensuring “*greater consistency and transparency of expectations*” in landlords’ involvement of tenants in the governance of the housing management service
 - a new stock transfer programme “*to promote the transfer of local authority housing particularly to community-based housing associations*”
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Tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities

The Government is considering how to “*celebrate the role of residents*” in shaping social housing, and is consulting on awards including investment to support successful initiatives, or funding for events and street parties. It will work towards the professionalisation of housing management “*to ensure all staff deliver a good quality of service*”.

In conjunction with the National Planning Policy Framework, the Government will:

- strengthen planning guidance and take into account the principles of Secured by Design
 - strengthen guidance to encourage healthy and active communities
 - strengthen guidance to encourage the building of new affordable homes with high-quality design
 - encourage inclusive design, such as for ageing populations and family housing at higher densities
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Expanding supply and supporting home ownership

The Government will review raising the housing borrowing cap for local authorities and they could be permitted to keep the Right to Buy receipts they already hold for longer than the current three years.

Consideration will be given to whether a greater proportion of the cost of new Social Rent council homes “*in areas of high affordability pressure*” should be met through Right to Buy receipts, alongside allowing “*greater flexibility*” over the tenure of replacement homes.

An “*evidence collection exercise*” on the housing allocations framework is proposed, including on:

- how local authority flexibilities on qualification and prioritisation are being used in practice
- how housing associations work with local authorities in allocating social housing
- the role of local variations in lettings delivery including how they facilitate choice for residents

A £200m large-scale pilot of the Voluntary Right to Buy pilot for housing association tenants will be launched this summer and more housing providers will be encouraged to offer homes as shared ownership, for those who cannot afford to purchase their home.

Implications for Riverside

We welcome the Green Paper after a long delay and are pleased Government is listening, with moves to empower tenants and strengthen their voice, which is something we are also committed to. There is still considerable detail to work through, and we look forward to responding to the consultation and additional call for evidence about the future of

regulation. It is important that we maintain an effective system of regulation which focuses on outcomes and, above all, puts the interests of current and future tenants at its heart. We also welcome a review into the use of receipts from Right to Buy sales to ensure tenants' aspirations are met but in a way that does not diminish the overall social housing stock.

We share the sector's disappointment that further investment to build genuinely affordable housing to make a real difference in tackling the housing crisis has not been announced. While we are pleased the Government recognises the stigma faced by social housing tenants, this can only be truly addressed once social housing becomes a tenure of choice and a benefit system is in place which covers housing costs in full for those who need support. Without investment to increase the supply of social housing, we will continue to see people fall through the safety net and suffer unnecessary hardship.

Reactions

The National Housing Federation, Chief Executive, [David Orr](#): *"Without significant new investment in the building of more social housing, it is very hard to see how it can be a safety net and springboard for all the people who desperately need it. Our ambition for the Green Paper is that it sets a course for a future where everyone can access a quality home they can afford. To do that we need to build 90,000 new social rent homes every year."*

Local Government Association Housing, spokesperson, [Cllr Judith Blake](#): *"We have long called for reforms to Right to Buy in order to allow councils to build more homes, and there are some positive signs in the consultation. But we must go much further so that councils can deliver the affordable homes that our residents need and deserve, including allowing councils to set discounts locally and to keep 100 per cent of receipts from homes sold."*

The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH), Policy manager, [Tamara Sandoul](#): *"We [...] strongly support the proposed review of the decent homes standard. This standard needs to align with standards for other tenures, so that all housing is made safer and healthier, and is simple for landlords to understand. However, there really are very few tangible proposals in this announcement. What we need to see are some concrete proposals from the Government on how they are going to ensure safe and high quality housing across the board, and what resources are going to be committed to it."*

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Chief Executive, [Campbell Robb](#): *"Whilst the plans to empower tenants and give them a real voice are very welcome the lack of concrete plans to build significantly more truly affordable homes risks failing a generation. Against a backdrop of rising foodbank use, families on low incomes will continue to face impossible choices about whether to pay the rent or put food on the table. We urge the Government to invest in 80,000 genuinely affordable homes a year at the next Spending Review to put things right"*

The Northern Housing Consortium has produced an [on-the-day briefing](#) which considers if the Green Paper is the root and branch review it promised to be and, if so, is it the review we would wish for in the North.

If you require further detail on anything within this briefing, please contact:

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