



Housing Policy Sub Committee 20th September 2018

Housing Green Paper Consultation

Purpose of report

This report advises members of the content of the Social Housing Green Paper and provides a suggested consultation response.

Attachment

Appendix 1: Suggested consultation response

1.0 Background

- 1.1 On 14th August 2018, the Government published a social housing green paper entitled '[A new deal for social housing](#)'. It sets out a proposed strategy for reforming social housing. (Paper copies are available from Democratic Services if required.)
- 1.2 Nearly one in 5 English homes are owned by housing associations or local councils but Government research indicates that many social housing residents feel ignored and stigmatised, and are treated with a lack of respect by landlords who appear remote, unaccountable and uninterested in meeting their needs.
- 1.3 The Government declares its commitment to ensuring social homes are safe and decent, and to getting more of the right homes built in the right places at prices people can afford, including a new generation of council homes. They also wish, particularly in the wake of the Grenfell fire, to empower social housing residents, giving them greater control over their lives, homes and communities.
- 1.4 The Green Paper is a consultation document and many of the proposals put forward are broad statements of intent, or a number of different options to deal with a problem, rather than concrete, detailed policy proposals. The consultation runs until 6th November 2018.

2.0 'A new deal for social housing'

- 2.1 The Green Paper at Appendix 1 is based around 5 core themes:
 - 2.1.1 **Ensuring homes are safe and decent** - The Government proposes:
 - Implementing the recommendations from the Hackitt Review of building regulations and fire safety, legislating to fundamentally reform the current system
 - Establishing a pilot with a group of social landlords who would trial options to improve communication and engagement with residents on safety issues
 - Reviewing the decent homes standard. This might include adding new requirements around energy efficiency and fire safety to mirror those introduced in the private rented sector.

- 2.1.2 **Complaints resolution** – The Government proposes a number of possible options to improve the way that complaints about social landlords are handled including:
- Ways to speed up landlords internal complaints processes, with timings, in a code of practice
 - Ways to improve the use of mediation in landlord and tenant disputes
 - Ways to raise awareness among tenants of their rights and options for them to make a complaint about their landlord
 - Reforming or removing the requirements for complainants to go through a designated person (MP, councillor or tenant panel) or wait 8 weeks before contacting the Housing Ombudsman
- 2.1.3 **Empowering residents and strengthening the regulator** – The Government proposes:
- Requiring all landlords to provide data on a number of key performance indicators to the regulator for regular publication. These would be published as league tables to enable comparison between landlords and performance taken into account when allocating Government funding to landlords e.g. to develop new homes
 - Considering a number of potential changes to the system of regulation for social landlords including enabling the regulator to be more proactive in enforcing the consumer standards and giving the regulator more powers to scrutinise the performance of Local Authority landlords
 - Giving tenants a voice on policy issues at a national level
 - Promoting more community ownership or community leadership within social housing sector
- 2.1.4 **Tackling stigma** – The Government proposes:
- Providing support for community events and initiatives
 - Encouraging more professionalism and a customer service culture within social housing
 - Encouraging new affordable homes to be designed to the same standard as other tenures and ensuring they are well integrated within developments.
- 2.1.5 **Expanding supply and supporting home ownership** – The Government proposes:
- Not requiring councils to sell their most valuable homes to fund the extension of the Right to Buy to all housing association tenants
 - Giving councils new flexibilities to spend the money raised from RTB sales on new homes
 - Not requiring councils to offer all new tenants a fixed term tenancy
 - Ensuring secure and assured tenants who need to move as a result of domestic abuse will retain their lifetime tenancy
 - Entering into deals with some housing associations to provide funding over a longer period to address the ‘stop-start’ nature of development funding
 - Supporting more community led house building
 - Gathering evidence on how social housing allocations are working in different areas
 - Making it easier for shared owners to increase their stake in their home by buying smaller increments.
- 2.2 The Government has issued a series of 48 consultation questions as part of the Green Paper. Most of the questions are technical in nature relating to the management and development of social housing stock and it would not therefore be appropriate for East Northamptonshire Council to respond to the individual questions. A more general

suggested response expressing support for the Governments' proposals is attached at Appendix 2.

- 2.3 There is a separate consultation paper on the use of Right to Buy receipts but this is unlikely to affect ENC as we do not receive receipts directly from the RTB but from Spire Homes through a clawback formula. Further investigation is being undertaken to ascertain the position both currently and once we are part of the North Northamptonshire unitary authority. Any implications will be reported at the meeting of the Sub-Committee.

3.0 Equality and Diversity Implications

- 3.1 As this is a consultation response no Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out at this stage. However, as the proposals seek to improve social housing and living conditions for poorer and more vulnerable residents, any impacts are likely to be positive.

4.0 Privacy Impact Implications

- 4.1 There are no privacy impact implications associated with responding to the consultation.

5.0 Legal Implications

- 5.1 There are no legal implications for the council in responding to the consultation.

6.0 Risk Management

- 6.1 There are no risks associated with responding to the consultation.

7.0 Resource and Financial Implications

- 7.1 There are no resource or financial implications associated with responding to the consultation.

8.0 Constitutional Implications

- 8.1 There are no constitutional implications associated with responding to the consultation.

9.0 Implications for our Customers

- 9.1 The Green Paper puts forward proposals which will benefit social housing residents in the district.

10.0 Corporate Outcomes

- 10.1 The proposals in the green paper will help deliver the following Corporate Outcomes:
- Good Quality of Life – Improving the homes and communities of social housing residents and empowering tenants
 - Effective Partnership Working – Partnership working with Registered Housing Providers to improve conditions for social housing tenants
 - High Quality Service Delivery – Improved customer service delivery

11.0 Recommendation

11.1 The Sub-Committee is recommended to:

- (1) Note the contents of the Social Housing Green Paper 'A new deal for social housing' at Appendix 1
- (2) Approve the suggested consultation response at Appendix 2.

(Reason – to encourage improvements in social housing and improve conditions for tenants.)

Legal	Power: Housing and Planning Act 2016				
	Other considerations:				
Background Papers:					
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Housing Green Paper – ‘A new deal for social housing’

Draft Consultation Response

East Northamptonshire Council no longer has any council owned housing stock having transferred it to East Northamptonshire Housing (now Spire Homes) in 2001. In addition, we have not developed any of our own stock since transfer and have no plans to do so as we head towards inclusion in the new unitary authority of North Northamptonshire from April 2020.

The council does not therefore consider that it is a position to respond in any detail to the questions posed in the Housing Green Paper but would like to express its broad support for the Government’s proposals. In particular, we welcome the following:

- **The increased emphasis on ensuring homes are safe and decent.**
East Northamptonshire Council takes its duty of care to its residents very seriously and, whilst we do not have any high rise dwellings in the district, in the wake of the Grenfell disaster we have sought assurance from all providers of permanent and temporary accommodation in the district that their accommodation complies with all fire safety requirements. We will continue to monitor the position on an annual basis. We therefore welcome Government proposals to remove and replace unsafe aluminium composite cladding and to give residents a much stronger voice in an improved system of fire safety.

We welcome the review of the Decent Homes Standard and the aim to bring it up to date, including improving fire safety and energy efficiency.

- **Improving the resolution of complaints**, both the internal processes of landlords and also through the ombudsman service. The current process, particularly the need for tenants to complain to the Housing Ombudsman through a designated person, is long-winded and as such is unsuitable where complaints need to be speedily resolved. A system of mediation between landlord and tenant may provide a better solution.
- **Giving residents more information on and influence over landlord performance**, enabling easy comparison through league tables. We welcome the proposals to link performance to future affordable housing funding through the Affordable Homes Programme, to improve resident engagement and scrutiny and to strengthen the role of the regulator.
- **Tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities.**
Social housing is vital for people on lower incomes, many of whom are vulnerable and have no other option than to rent a home. It is unfair that they are subject to stigmatisation and prejudice because of where they live and the

council welcomes the Government's intention to tackle such prejudice and to recognise the positive contribution that social housing residents make to their communities and to society. We support the aim to embed a customer service culture in social housing and to attract, retain and develop the right professional people into housing management.

We welcome Government intentions to reduce anti-social behaviour and agree that estate and house design and providing energy efficient homes contribute to the well-being of residents. However, we would like to see stronger scrutiny and regulation of housing associations and registered providers around their responses to anti-social behaviour by their tenants. As a local authority we have experienced mixed responses by some RPs in dealing with ASB in social housing situations.

We welcome the strengthening of planning guidance in respect of Secured by Design, to encourage healthy and active communities, to encourage well-designed and integrated affordable homes and to encourage design to reflect changing demographic needs.

- **Expanding housing supply and supporting home ownership**

We welcome Government recognition that rural areas are under housing pressure as well as the urban centres and welcome the continuing support for home ownership. However, it is vital that homes lost to the social sector through sales are replaced or councils will not be able to meet their statutory duties in respect of housing and homelessness. We therefore welcome the increased potential for LAs to borrow and the exploration of new flexibilities over spending Right to Buy receipts, thereby removing barriers preventing LAs from building new homes.

We welcome the potential to offer more long term funding to housing associations to enable them to build more homes and to assist those living in affordable homes to more easily progress to owning them.

We welcome proposals to increase community led housing and resident-led estate regeneration as well as the recognition that social impact investors have a part to play to increase the supply of social housing, particularly for more vulnerable residents.

We welcome the review of housing allocations policies and the lifting of the requirement for LAs to offer only fixed term tenancies. We further welcome the right of victims of domestic abuse to retain their lifetime tenancy if they are forced to move.

We welcome the increased delivery of shared ownership homes and the intention to assist people to buy further shares. However, we recognise that

not everyone can find the deposit required to enter into shared ownership. We therefore support the provision of Rent to Buy homes and the proposal that Rent to Buy tenants should also be given the opportunity to buy a stake in their homes under shared ownership.