

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
CABINET HOUSING PANEL – 25TH OCTOBER 2018
REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR (HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES)

SOCIAL HOUSING GREEN PAPER “A NEW DEAL FOR SOCIAL HOUSING” -
CONSULTATION

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Government published its new social housing green paper on the 14 August 2018, seeking views on its vision for social housing “providing safe, secure homes that help people get on with their lives”.
- 1.2 The paper contains five main themes and offers different options to address the problems for social housing as the Government perceives them. The themes are:
 - a) Ensuring homes are warm and decent
 - b) Effective resolution of complaints.
 - c) Empowering residents and strengthening the regulator
 - d) Tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities
 - e) Expanding supply and supporting homeownership.
- 1.3 The consultation runs for eight weeks and provided the Council with the opportunity to deliver a response which is contained within this report.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 Members to consider and comment on the draft response to the consultation on the social housing green paper.

3 Explanation

- 3.1 In the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire, the then Communities Secretary, Sajid Javid, committed to a “top to bottom” review of social housing, that would inform the development of a new housing green paper.
- 3.2 Ministers from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government organised events to seek views from social housing residents across the country. They consulted with nearly 1000 people at the events and a further 7000 provided views on-line.
- 3.3 Findings from the consultation, mirrored the claims of many residents and survivors of Grenfell. Many felt they were treated by their landlords, with a lack of respect, concerns and complaints were often ignored even around issue of repair and safety, they felt ill-informed on processes for escalation and redress and felt stigmatised generally because of where they lived and for not owning their own homes.

3.4 On the 14th August 2018 the new green paper, titled “A new deal for social housing” was published and put out for consultation. It sets out the government’s vision and proposals to reform social housing. The full paper can be viewed at www.gov.uk/government/consultations/a-new-deal-for-social-housing

3.5 The government identified five key priority areas:

3.5.1 Ensuring homes are warm and decent

- a) The Government has accepted the outcomes of a report commissioned from Dame Judith Hackett calling for fundamental reform of building regulations and fire safety; prepared to legislate if necessary
- b) Proposes setting up a pilot with a group of social landlords to produce resident engagement strategies for health and safety of their buildings.
- c) Review of the current ‘decent homes’ definition and standards, possibly to include more around energy efficiency and fire standards to align with the private sector.

3.5.2 Effective resolution of complaints

- a) Looking at how the current complaints process can be reformed so that it is quicker and easier; especially with safety concerns.
- b) Exploring how to raise awareness of tenants’ rights, and ensure residents can access the right advice to make a complaint and obtain a stronger voice to influence decisions and challenge their landlord to improve living standards.
- c) Exploring options to use mediation between tenants and landlord
- d) Reviewing the requirement that complainants go through a “designated person” (MP, Cllr etc.) or wait 8 wks before being able to contact the Ombudsman.

3.5.3 Empowering residents and strengthening the regulator

- a) Looking at how the current complaints process can be reformed so that it is quicker and easier; especially with safety concerns.
- b) Explore how to raise awareness of tenants’ rights, and ensure residents can access the right advice to make a complaint and obtain a stronger voice to influence decisions and challenge their landlord to improve living standards.
- c) Options to use mediation between tenants and landlord
- d) Reviewing the requirement that complainants go through a “designated person” (MP, Cllr etc.) or wait 8 wks before being able to contact the Ombudsman.

3.5.4 Tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities

- a) Looking at how the current complaints process can be reformed so that it is quicker and easier; especially with safety concerns.

- b) Explore how to raise awareness of tenants' rights, and ensure residents can access the right advice to make a complaint and obtain a stronger voice to influence decisions and challenge their landlord to improve living standards.
- c) Options to use mediation between tenants and landlord
- d) Reviewing the requirement that complainants go through a "designated person" (MP, Cllr etc.) or wait 8 wks before being able to contact the Ombudsman.

3.5.5 Expanding supply and supporting home ownership

- a) Outlines plans to build on the new borrowing capacity granted to councils by looking at flexibilities on how they spend the Right to Buy receipts. (Separate consultation running. This will not include keeping 100% of receipts as recent public demands have been made on Government to do)
- b) Confirming Council's will not be required to sell off vacant, higher value stock as previously proposed in the Housing and Planning Act.
- c) Scrapping plans to force council's to offer fixed-term tenancies to all new tenants, instead keeping it discretionary.
- d) The paper also considers partnerships with housing associations to boost the supply of new affordable homes through the benefits of funding certainty to some associations over a longer period.
- e) An intention toward reforms to help those using affordable home ownership schemes – like shared ownership – to build up more equity in their homes, maybe allowing purchase of much smaller percentages than are usually possible.
- f) Ensuring survivors of domestic abuse who lose their secure tenure as a result, are able to retain a lifetime tenancy.
- g) Exploring ways to increase development of Community-led house building.

3.6 Relevant officer's from housing and planning services, debated the proposals and contributed to the draft consultation response (attached).

3.7 Members of this committee are asked to consider and comment on the draft response prior to a final draft being agreed by the Executive Member for Housing and Community

Implications

4 Legal Implication(s)

4.1 There are no legal implications for the council in providing the response. Implementation of some of the proposals put forward in the consultation could

lead to changes in legislation that the council may acquire additional duties from in the future.

- 4.2 This Panel will be kept informed of any future changes to regulation or legislation which arise and the implications of that.

5 Financial Implication(s)

- 5.1 There are no financial implications for the council in submitting the response. There may be additional financial burdens in the future should some of the proposals put forward in the consultation be implemented

- 5.2 This Panel will be kept informed of any future changes to regulation or legislation which arise and the implications of that.

6 Risk Management Implications

- 6.1 There is a reputational risk to the council of failing to provide a response

7 Security and Terrorism Implication(s)

- 7.1 **There are no security and terrorism implications arising from this report**

8 Procurement Implication(s)

- 8.1 None – as above

9 Climate Change Implication(s)

- 9.1 none – as above

10 Human Resources Implication(s)

- 10.1 None – as above

11 Health and Wellbeing Implication(s)

- 11.1 The ethos of the Social Housing Green Paper generally is to improve the safety of property and wellbeing of the community

12 Communication and Engagement Implication(s)

- 12.1 There are no communication and engagement implications for the council in submitting the response. However implementation of some of the proposals put forward in the green paper could lead to changes in legislation, that may put additional requirements on the council in relation to its communication and engagement strategy in the future

13 Link to Corporate Priorities

- 13.1 The subject of this report is linked to the Council's Corporate Priority (Our Housing), and specifically to the achievement of (quality landlord)

14 Equality and Diversity

14.1 An EqIA was not completed because this report does not propose changes to existing service-related policies or the development of new service-related policies.

Report authors should note that the paragraphs above may need to be amended to suit the proposals in the report, e.g. there could be negative and positive impacts.

Name of author	(Rachel Sesstein)
Title	(<i>Housing Strategy Manager</i>)
Date	(10/10/18)

Background papers to be listed (if applicable)

1. Social Housing Green Paper “A Better Deal for Social Housing”

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/733635/A_new_deal_for_social_housing_print_ready_version.pdf

Appendices to be listed

1. Draft Social Housing Green Paper Consultation Response