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Social Housing Green Paper

Residents' Briefing

Strategy, Research and Communications

September 2018

Introduction

A year after the fire at Grenfell Tower, the government has published a [Social Housing Green Paper](#). Green Papers are documents produced by the government to allow the public to give feedback on new policy proposals. This paper has a strong focus on empowering social housing residents, and is open to ideas on how this can be done.

The government has now launched their [consultation on the Green Paper](#). Network Homes plans to respond to the consultation by 6 November. As part of this, we welcome your views on some of the proposals from the paper, particularly around how we could improve how we share information around building safety and how we operate, and how you'd like to be involved in shaping services as a resident. Your feedback will be anonymous, and you are welcome to respond to as many or little questions as you'd like. You are also welcome to submit your own independent response to the government's paper.

This document is an overview of the government's proposals.

Key points

It's clear the government is open to suggestions, as many of the government's proposals aren't fully formed, and many issues remain open to consultation with the public. The paper's main proposals include:

- Quicker processes for resident complaints and more support for residents to access redress
- Potential introduction of league tables for housing associations, which could reward or punish housing associations financially depending on how well they perform
- A focus on increased need for resident involvement
- A [call for evidence](#) to review current social housing regulation
- Strengthening the Regulator of Social Housing so that it can focus on issues that matter most to residents, and has 'sharper teeth' to intervene when needed
- Support of new home ownership options, for example, opportunities for shared ownership residents to increase their shares in the property (staircasing) in smaller amounts
- Housing providers continue to have choice around using fixed term tenancies
- The launch of [consultation paper](#) on reforming use of Right to Buy receipts.

Overview

The government has released a Green Paper on social housing. The paper aims to empower residents and involve the Social Housing Regulator more, to ensure social landlords are accountable to their residents. The Paper found that many social housing residents feel 'ignored' and 'stigmatised' because they live in social housing. We'd like to address this issue directly – and so we've asked if this is something you've experienced, and if so, what we could do to change this.

We recognise that while many of you are happy with the services we provide, there are still areas we need to do better. As part of this, we are currently undergoing a variety of improvement projects, including a review of our resident engagement strategy, an IT project to enable quicker customer responses, a revised customer service offer with more focus on core services we provide, and increased publications on how we operate as an organisation. We especially welcome your views on how you or other residents could get more involved in helping shaping our services.

We'd also like to know if the existing financial, repairs and complaints performance information we publish are useful to you, if there's a better way we could show you this information, or something else you'd like to see that we don't yet publish. The government has suggested introducing league tables for housing associations, ranked by performance. We believe that publishing performance data could genuinely improve services for social housing residents across the country – but the government needs to be measuring the things that matter most to residents.

The Green Paper has also rightfully highlighted the importance of resident safety. Since the tragedy at Grenfell Tower, we have increased communications with you about building safety, and we'll continue to do so. But we'd also like to hear from you on what level of building safety information you'd like to receive from us, and how best we could share this with you.

We've focused our survey questions around core themes of information we publish, and how we involve you and other residents, but if you find there are other areas of the Green Paper you'd like to respond to, you are more than welcome to write to our consultation inbox at consultations@networkhomes.org.uk or send your own individual response to the government directly through their website.

Below is a more detailed summary of the Green Paper by chapter.

Chapter 1 – Ensuring homes are safe and decent

In light of the Grenfell tragedy, this chapter outlines proposals for safe and decent homes by:

- Making sure the [recommendations from the Hackitt Review](#) happen, which will reform building regulations and fire safety systems, and support residents to speak with their landlord about building safety issues
- Setting up a pilot with social landlords to trial options to improve communication and engagement with residents on safety issues
- Reviewing the Decent Homes Standard to consider if it's demanding enough, delivers the right standards, and whether homes need to reach Energy Performance Certificate Band C by 2030.

Chapter 2 – Effective resolution of complaints

The Green Paper says there needs to be a robust complaints process, and that residents should have a stronger voice to influence decisions and challenge landlords to improve their performance. The government proposes complaints handling could be improved by:

- Speeding up landlords' internal complaints process
- Speeding up responses around safety concerns for residents, such as a clear and direct route of escalation and redress in relation to building and fire safety issues
- Improving the use of mediation in disputes
- Changing the requirement that complaints must go through a 'designated person' (e.g. local councillor, tenant panel) before a resident can contact the Housing Ombudsman, as this can delay the complaints process
- Raising awareness among tenants of their rights and options to escalate complaints.

Chapter 3 – Empowering residents and strengthening the regulator

To empower residents, the government suggests providing better information to residents on how their landlord is performing compared to others. The Green Paper proposes:

- Residents should be able to compare landlords' performance more easily
- Landlords should be assessed against standards that matter to residents
- A suggestion that landlords regularly report key performance indicators (KPI's) to the Regulator. These would be published and easy to compare, maybe in the form of league tables
- These KPI's would include repairs, buildings' safety, complaints handling, engagement with residents and neighbourhood management
- Considering whether the government could use financial incentives and penalties to promote the best practice and deter the worst performance. The government may look at a housing association's performance when allocating development funding and setting up future strategic partnerships
- Separate call for evidence on changing the system of regulation for social landlords. These changes could include being more proactive and rigorous in enforcing the 'consumer standards' including possibly changing/removing the 'serious detriment' test

- Looking into whether consumer regulation standards need a definition of what a good service looks like, including a new Regulatory Code of Practice
- Looking into establishing a tenant representative body on a national level
- Looking at ways to promote community leadership/co-regulation
- Looking into extending the Regulator's remit to other organisations that manage social housing
- Exploring how social leaseholders can better input into consultation on major works through a sector advisory group.

Chapter 4 – Tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities

This chapter states many residents feel looked down on for living in social housing. It addresses tackling 'stigma' felt by social housing residents by:

- Encouraging housing associations to have a good 'customer service culture' and be professional
- Proposing a 'best neighbourhoods' award to fund resident or community events
- Promoting 'See the person' campaign telling positive stories about social housing residents
- Asking if there's evidence that housing associations' community activities are valuable – and if housing associations should report on this
- Considering introducing a measure for how well landlords manage neighbourhoods, and how well they deal with anti-social behaviour complaints
- Emphasising social housing design should be of high quality
- Stating residents should be involved in the design, delivery and management of social housing.

Chapter 5 – Expanding supply and supporting home ownership

Addresses Right to Buy, encourages more flexible Shared Ownership options, and launches an information exercise to understand how housing allocation works in practice. The government:

- Published a separate [consultation paper](#) on reforming Right to Buy (RTB) receipts
- Wants to create more opportunities for residents to be partners in estate regeneration
- Wants to encourage community-led housing projects
- Will speed up law for tenants suffering domestic abuse to keep lifetime secure tenancy
- Will collect evidence on how housing allocation works, and how housing associations work with local authorities within that process
- Launches [call for evidence](#) to review regulations for social housing
- Wants housing associations to encourage home ownership, for example, by offering shared owners the chance to increase shares in their homes in smaller amounts.

Further information

If you have any questions about the survey, please email consultations@networkhomes.org.uk or contact 0300 373 3000 and ask to speak to a member of the Research and Policy team.