

**Lead Officer:** Ozay Ali, Interim Director of Homes & Social Investment

**Wards:** All

**Subject:** The Housing White Paper

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## 1. Recommendations

- 1.1 The Panel is asked to note and comment on the contents of this report and agree to the formation of a residents' group to ensure that Croydon fully meets future statutory and regulatory requirements.

## 2. Background

- 2.1 On 17 November 2020 the Government published a Social Housing White Paper. It has been labelled as a "Charter for Social Housing Residents" and sets out a range of measures to strengthen the regulation of social landlords and empower tenants and residents to hold their landlord to account and obtain redress where service falls below standards expected.
- 2.2 This report outlines the key elements of the White Paper, a proposal to work in partnership with residents in responding to future statutory and regulatory requirements and sets out Croydon's current position in relation to the proposals in the Paper.

## 3. The Housing White Paper – A Summary

- 3.1 The White Paper sets out the Government's seven point Charter for Social Housing which will apply to all local authority and housing association tenants and leaseholders.
- 3.2 The seven points can be summarised as follows:
1. **To be safe in your home.** We will work with industry and landlords to ensure every home is safe and secure.
  2. **To know how your landlord is performing**, including on repairs, complaints and safety, and how it spends its money, so you can hold it to account.
  3. **To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly**, with access to a strong Ombudsman who will give you swift and fair redress when needed.
  4. **To be treated with respect**, backed by a strong consumer regulator and improved consumer standards for tenants.

5. **To have your voice heard by your landlord**, for example through regular meetings, scrutiny panels or being on its Board. The Government will provide help, if you want it, to give you the tools to ensure your landlord listens.
6. **To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in**, with your landlord keeping your home in good repair.
7. **To be supported to take your first step to ownership**, so it is a ladder to other opportunities, should your circumstances allow.

#### **4. The Detail**

##### **4.1 To be safe in your home**

- Legislation to strengthen the existing regulations to explicitly include safety.
- Legislation to require social landlords to identify a nominated person responsible for complying with their health and safety requirements.
- Expect the Regulator of Social Housing to prepare a Memorandum of Understanding with the Health and Safety Executive to ensure effective sharing of information with the Building Safety Regulator.
- Launch a consultation on requiring smoke alarms in social housing and introducing new expectations for carbon monoxide alarms.
- Consult on measures to ensure that social housing residents are protected from harm caused by poor electrical safety.
- Continue to work with the Social Sector (Building Safety) Engagement Best Practice Group and the Building Safety Regulator to ensure resident voices are heard.

##### **4.2 To know how your landlord is performing**

- Create a set of tenant satisfaction measures for landlords on things that matter to tenants.
- Introduce a new access to information scheme for tenants so that information relating to landlords is easily available.
- Ensure landlords provide a clear breakdown of how their income is being spent.
- Require landlords to identify a senior person in their organisation who is responsible for ensuring they comply with the consumer standards set by the Regulator of Social Housing.

##### **4.3 To have your complaints dealt with promptly**

- Speed up access to the Housing Ombudsman by removing the need for

residents to either go to a 'designated person' or wait eight weeks before approaching the Ombudsman directly.

- Expanding the Housing Ombudsman service and increased its powers.
- Provide residents with consistency across landlord complaint handling by ensuring landlords self- assess against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.
- Ensure tenants know how to raise complaints and have confidence in the system by launching a communications campaign. We will expect landlords, the Housing Ombudsman and the Building Safety Regulator to ensure residents have clear and up to date information on how to complain.
- Legislate to ensure clear co-operation between the Housing Ombudsman and the Regulator of Social Housing to hold landlords to account more effectively when things go wrong

#### **4.4 To be treated with respect**

- Transform the consumer regulation role of the Regulator of Social Housing so it proactively monitors and drives landlords' compliance with improved consumer standards.
- Remove the 'serious detriment test' and introduce routine inspections for the largest landlords (those with over 1,000 homes) every four years.
- Change the regulator's objectives to explicitly cover safety and transparency, and work with it to review its consumer standards to ensure they are up to date and deliver its revised objectives.
- Give the regulator the power to publish a Code of Practice on the consumer standards to be clear what landlords are required to deliver.
- Strengthen the regulator's enforcement powers to tackle failing landlords and to respond to new challenges facing the sector.
- Hold local authorities to account as landlords to make sure they deliver a good service to tenants.

#### **4.5 To have your voice heard by your landlord**

- Expect the regulator to require landlords to seek out best practice and consider how they can continually improve the way they engage with tenants.
- Deliver a new opportunities and empowerment programme for social housing residents, to support more effective engagement between landlords and residents, and to give residents tools to influence their landlords and hold them to account.

- Review professional training and development to ensure residents receive a high standard of customer service.

#### **4.6 To have a good quality home and neighbourhood**

- Review the Decent Homes Standard, including access to and the quality of green spaces.
- Tackle anti-social behaviour by enabling tenants to know who is responsible for action and who can support and assist them if they are faced with anti-social behaviour.
- ensure that housing is allocated in the fairest way possible and achieves the best outcomes for local places and communities

#### **4.7 To be supported into home ownership**

- Investing £11.5 billion to build up to 180,000 affordable homes – the highest single funding commitment to affordable housing in a decade. Around half of these new homes will be for affordable home ownership.
- Implementing a new, fairer and more accessible model for Shared Ownership.
- Implementing a new Right to Shared Ownership for tenants of housing associations and other private registered providers who live in new grant funded homes for rent.
- Emphasising through our new National Design Guide the importance of building beautiful and well-designed social homes.
- Introducing a new Affordable Homes Guarantee Scheme.
- Encouraging local authorities to take advantage of our removal of the borrowing cap to build more council homes.

### **5. Tenant Satisfaction Measures**

- 5.1 The regulator will develop a process for collecting and publishing a core set of tenant satisfaction measures for all social landlords. They will also consider the best way of publishing measures so that they are clear and accessible for all tenants, and how to ensure landlords publicise them. The Government expect an annual statement to be provided to every tenant as a minimum and for technology to be used (such as an app) to provide this more directly and accessibly.
- 5.2 The housing regulator will work with the Building Safety Regulator as it develops performance standards and reporting requirements as part of the new building safety regime for higher-risk buildings.
- 5.3 A draft set of tenant satisfaction measures are set out in the White Paper and these can be found in appendix A of this report. The regulator is to do further

work, engaging with tenants and landlords, to finalise these and embed them within the regulatory system

## **6. The Next Steps**

- 6.1 Legislation will be required before many of the policies contained in the White Paper can be introduced and it is not clear at this time what the likely timescales will be for this to happen.
- 6.2 The Housing Regulator will need to consult with tenants, social housing providers and other stakeholders regarding the detail of the revised consumer regulations and inspection regime. It will also need to restructure itself so that it is properly resourced to deliver its enhanced functions.
- 6.3 The Housing Regulator has indicated that work is already underway and that consultation will take place throughout the coming year. It will initially focus on the Tenant Satisfaction Measures.
- 6.4 In the meantime it expects all social landlords to commence a review of the way it engages with its tenants so that they are able to demonstrate that they will be well placed to meet future regulatory requirements.

## **7. Croydon's Response**

- 7.1 The Council welcomes the release of this White Paper. Croydon has always recognised the value of resident involvement and has an excellent track record in engaging and involving tenants and leaseholders in service development and performance monitoring.
- 7.2 Over the past few years we have introduced very effective tenant scrutiny mechanisms, conducted various tenant feedback surveys, established a performance monitoring group, complaints panel and health & safety panel. However, we are not complacent and have always recognised the need to continually review and enhance the way we engage, involve and communicate with all tenants and leaseholders to ensure it is effective and that everyone has the opportunity to get involved and make their voice heard.
- 7.3 Following the release of the White Paper we have conducted a desk top exercise to set out how we feel we are meeting the key elements and to identify the gaps that need to be addressed. The results are summarised in appendix B.
- 7.4 It is proposed that a residents' working group be established to work with the council to oversee and contribute to the council's response to the White Paper, including replying to future consultation from the Housing Regulator and ensuring that we fully meet regulatory and statutory requirements.

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