

HOUSING UPDATE

Cabinet Member(s): Councillor Ray Stanley
Responsible Officer: Claire Fry, Group Manager for Housing

Reason for Report: To provide a written briefing on latest developments relating to social housing

RECOMMENDATION: Members to note the report.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: Homes are a priority for the Council and this includes increasing supply in the District and also ensuring that those homes in our ownership are managed efficiently and effectively.

Financial Implications: None arising from this briefing

Legal Implications: None arising from this briefing

Risk Assessment: None arising from this briefing

Equality Impact Assessment: None arising from this briefing

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Members agreed that it would be helpful to receive a regular briefing on matters relating to social housing.
- 1.2 The week commencing 13 August 2018 was designated: "Housing Week" by the Government and several announcements were made. Information about these and other relevant matters is provided in this briefing note.

2.0 Social Housing Green Paper 2018

- 2.1 On 14 August 2018, the Government published a Green Paper entitled: "A new deal for social housing" which set out a proposed strategy for reforming social housing. The Green Paper contained a number of long-awaited proposals for social housing. More than 8,000 people had already been consulted and more views are being sought during the consultation period, which is due to run until 6 November 2018. Many of the proposals contained within the document are broad statements of intent; however, in some cases, the Government has suggested different options as a way forward in relation to a particular issue.
- 2.2 The proposed strategy is based around five key themes:
 - Ensuring homes are safe and decent
 - Effective resolution of complaints
 - Empowering residents and strengthening the regulator
 - Tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities

- Expanding supply and supporting home ownership

- 2.3 With regard to the provision of a safe and decent home, the Green Paper sets out a commitment relating to this and suggests a review of the Decent Homes Standard, which has remained unchanged since 2006. This may also apply to private sector residents and might include new requirements relating to energy efficiency and fire safety to mirror those recently introduced in the private sector.
- 2.4 It also proposes implementing the recommendations from the Hackitt Review of building regulations and fire safety, and the implementation of legislation to reform the current system.
- 2.5 The paper also proposes the establishment of a pilot with a group of social landlords in order to trial options aimed at the improvement of communication and engagement with residents on safety issues. It looks at the best model for on-going maintenance of properties and this includes looking at stock transfers from local authorities to housing associations.
- 2.6 With regard to increasing tenancy engagement, the Green Paper includes a commitment to deliver greater involvement for tenants. To this end, there are suggested changes to the complaints process which are designed to speed up the process. This may be, for example, by asking the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) to set out some suggested timings in a code of practice. In addition, there are some suggestions relating to the use of mediation between landlords and tenants with a view to supporting dispute resolution. There are also some suggestions relating to the accessibility of the complaints process and raising awareness among tenants of their rights and the options available to them if they wish to make a complaint regarding their landlord. In particular, there is a suggestion relating to the removal of the requirement that complainants have to escalate their complaint to a “designated person” once the landlords own internal complaints process has been exhausted.
- 2.7 There are proposals to make regulation relating to the consumer standards more pro-active. Members will recall that the consumer standards are those relating to tenant involvement and empowerment; homes; tenancies; and neighbourhoods and communities. In accordance with the proposals, the RSH would be able to commence enforcement action even if no “serious detriment” had occurred. A separate call for evidence has also been published in connection with this.
- 2.8 There is a proposal to introduce league tables and landlords would be required to provide data on a number of key performance indicators (KPIs). Performance between different landlords could then be compared. It is widely anticipated that these KPIs will cover repairs related issues including safety, complaints, resident engagement, and also neighbourhood management. In addition, it should be noted that this could perhaps inform decisions relating to the allocation of funding to support the development of new homes.
- 2.9 The Green Paper also contained options to give tenants more influence on policy issues at a national level with the establishment of a representative body being suggested.

- 2.10 In addition, a number of options are suggested in relation to the promotion of more community ownership, or community leadership of social landlords.
- 2.11 Another potential change could include giving the RSH new powers to review the governance arrangements of local authorities, to ensure that all social housing residents have the same protection.
- 2.12 There is a pledge contained within the Green Paper to legislate to protect lifetime tenants who are survivors of domestic abuse with lifetime tenancies in new homes.
- 2.13 The Government has proposed a number of other initiatives to support work to reduce the stigma associated with social housing. These include publishing further guidance relating to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) to encourage new affordable homes to be designed to the same standard as other tenures and ensuring these are well-integrated within developments. In addition, there is reference to the encouragement of greater levels of professionalism and a “customer service culture” within the social housing sector and the provision of support for community events and initiatives.
- 2.14 Increasing the supply of housing is a key priority for the Government.
- 2.15 The Green Paper contains proposals to give local authorities greater flexibility to spend monies raised through right to buy sales on new homes. A separate consultation has been launched in relation to this.
- 2.16 In addition, the policy relating to the sale of high value Council stock has been formally abandoned.
- 2.17 Furthermore, plans to require councils to offer all new tenants a tenancy for a fixed term have also been shelved although local authority landlords will still be able to use fixed term tenancies at their own discretion.
- 2.18 The Green Paper also discusses the development of more community-led house building; and working with housing associations in arrangements to provide certainty over funding for new homes.
- 2.19 There are also proposals to review the way in which social housing is allocated in different areas. This is in order to ensure that the best use of housing stock is being made. The Government is proposing to collect evidence to facilitate a review of how local authorities are exercising their ability to determine qualification criteria and priority in terms of the allocation of social housing. In addition, this review would look at how housing associations work with local authorities; and at the role of local authorities in lettings generally and also more specifically the choice available to housing applicants.
- 2.20 There is a pledge to develop a scheme which offers tenants the right to buy 1% of their home each year. In addition, there is a proposal relating to an options appraisal to make it easier for new shared owners to increase their percentage of ownership of their home in the future which might include, for

example, allowing them to buy much smaller increments than are usually possible.

3.0 Grenfell Tower – issues arising

3.1 Matters arising from the fire and subsequent events continue to generate considerable media interest. It would appear that the Green Paper was influenced to a great extent by a desire to prevent such a tragedy ever happening again.

3.2 On 18 July 2018, the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee suggested that a ban on flammable cladding for new high-rise buildings, being considered by the Government following the fire, should be extended to include existing buildings, residential homes, hospitals, student accommodation and hotels.

3.3 On 31 July 2018, the BBC reported that suppliers of fire doors have been told to make changes after five products failed safety tests. Tests on the fire door used in the Grenfell Tower block showed that it could only resist fire for half the time expected. All doors known to have failed to meet safety standards have been withdrawn from sale. Some of the doors which are supposed to withstand fire for at least 30 minutes, failed within 19 minutes. Communities Secretary, James Brokenshire, ordered door manufacturers to have an urgent meeting and said that they must devise a “clear plan of action to rectify existing problems and ensure such failures are not repeated in the future.”

4.0 Review of consumer regulation

4.1 In the introduction to their Review of Consumer Regulation for 2017/18, the RSH said in the introduction: “Complying with health and safety obligations remains the most fundamental responsibility for governing bodies of registered providers (RPs) (boards and Councillors). It is essential that RPs are able to demonstrate that they are meeting their health and safety obligations, and that tenants are not at risk in their homes.”

4.2 As stated, the Council must comply with four regulatory standards, known as the consumer standards.

4.3 In the review, the RSH reported that it had received 543 consumer referrals during the year, 204 of which were considered by its consumer regulation panel. Of these, 77 were investigated. Referrals are only considered if the RSH judges that issues raised fall within their remit and if it considers that there has been a breach of a consumer standard. It found breaches of the consumer standard in just five cases.

5.0 Universal Credit

5.1 Full service of Universal Credit has been rolled out in Mid Devon. Members will recall that this is a benefit which replaces several others including Jobseekers Allowance and Housing Benefit. It is a fully digital service and claimants need to make claims online and to communicate with their Job Coaches online, as well.

5.2 There are concerns that the current system could exacerbate domestic abuse. Single payments are usually given to one family member but this could give an abusive partner easier control over the family's entire source of income. On 1 August 2018, the Commons Work and Pensions Committee released a report which said that the Government had a "moral duty" to ensure that the benefits system did not facilitate abuse.

6.0 **Rough sleeping initiative**

6.1 On 13 August 2018, James Brokenshire launched a £100 million strategy aimed at ending rough sleeping by 2027. The strategy has three strands: prevention, intervention and recovery.

6.2 The prevention strand will involve understanding the issues that lead to rough sleeping and providing timely support for those at risk. The Government is proposing to engage with different sections of society to understand how they experience homelessness. As an example, they talk about how homelessness may impact those in the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual community.

6.3 The intervention strand will involve helping those already sleeping rough with tailored support. In addition, there is a proposal to put in place "navigators", that is, specialists who will act as trusted confidants and help people sleeping rough access the appropriate services and accommodation. Funding is being made available to Streetlink and this will support the public, business and communities to engage positively with people who sleep rough through an improved app.

6.4 In the narrative relating to the recovery strand, the Government has acknowledged that a stable home is an essential element in supporting rough sleepers to move on and that flexible support tailored to individual needs is important if they are to sustain their recovery. £50 million of funding is being made available to increase the supply of housing outside of London for people who have slept rough or those who are ready to move on from hostels or refuges and need additional support. There is also finance being provided for support; and a new approach to funding homes for people who sleep, or are at risk of sleeping, rough.

7.0 **Plymouth – Clarion development**

7.1 Clarion Housing Group submitted a planning application to Plymouth City Council on 23 July 2018 to undertake a large regeneration programme on the Barne Barton Estate. The programme is expected to cost £22 million and will regenerate what was once the largest Naval estate in Britain, changing the layout of the estate, providing new homes and enhancing community spaces. The project is also designed to create opportunities for home ownership.

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Circulation of the Report: Councillor Ray Stanley

List of Background Papers:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/a-new-deal-for-social-housing>

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/housing-communities-and-local-government-committee/news/building-regulations-fire-safety-report-published-17-19/>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-45024375>

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/730021/Consumer_Regulation_Review_2017-18_20180727.pdf

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/work-and-pensions-committee/news-parliament-2017/universal-credit-domestic-abuse-report-publication-17-19/>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-rough-sleeping-strategy>

<http://www.clarionhg.com/news-research/2018/july/planning-submitted-for-22m-transformation-of-plymouth-estate/>