

Social Housing (Regulation) Bill

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Date: 15th June 2023

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Social Housing White Paper

It seeks to deliver transformational change and address everyone's expectations that:

A home should provide safety, security and dignity. An opportunity to put down roots and contribute to our community so we can enjoy social and civic lives. Regardless of who you rent from, your landlord should treat you fairly and with respect. And if things go wrong there should be a swift and effective means to redress.

Seeks to learn lessons from:

- The tragedy at Grenfell Tower
- The views of residents on the Social Housing Green Paper 2018
- Views on how social housing is regulated including complaints
- The impact of Covid-19 pandemic and the importance of people's homes, communities, neighbourhoods and green spaces.
- The importance of social isolation, support for the vulnerable, wellbeing, mental health, crime and anti-social behaviour
- Addressing energy efficiency and safety of buildings

A new approach to regulation

Social Housing Regulation Bill will bring about one of the most fundamental changes to Social housing regulation for over a decade

- The legislation will set new expectations on the services that landlords need to provide for their tenants.
- New Consumer regulation and standards
- Reactive inspections every 4 years considering feedback from tenants, board reports on service performance, evidence from the Housing Ombudsman
- Tenant satisfaction measures
- Look at assurances councillors are getting about the quality of homes, service performance and their engagement with residents.
- Stronger powers if things go wrong (improvement plans / sanctions)
- Publish conclusions from individual consumer inspections

A New Charter for Social Housing Residents

Sets out what every social housing resident should be able to expect from their landlord

1. To be safe in your home
2. To know how your landlord is performing
3. To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly
4. To be treated with respect
5. To have your voice heard by your landlord
6. To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in
7. To be supported to take your first step to ownership

To be safe in your home

- Strengthen the Regulator of Social Housing's consumer regulation objectives to explicitly include safety.
- Nominated person responsible for complying with their health and safety requirements.
- Health and Safety Executive to ensure effective sharing of information with the Building Safety Regulator.
- Consultation on smoke alarms and introducing new expectations for carbon monoxide alarms.
- Consult on measures to ensure that residents are protected from harm caused by poor electrical safety.
- Work with the Social Sector (Building Safety) Engagement Best Practice Group and the Building Safety Regulator to ensure resident voices are heard.
- Building safety bill and Fire safety bill which includes more stringent regime for design, construction, day to day management and maintenance of higher risk building with residents having a strong voice in the system. This will drive culture change to put safety first
- Resident engagement strategy for each building which includes regular communication and two way engagement with residents on Fire safety and building management.

To know how your landlord is performing

- Tenant satisfaction measures for landlords on things that matter to tenants.
- Introduce a new access to information scheme for social housing tenants of housing associations and other private registered providers of social housing, 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 and is clearly visible to residents.
- Report to tenants at least once a year.

To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly

- Speeding up the access to the Housing Ombudsman by removing the need for residents to either go to a designated person (democratic filter) or wait eight weeks.
- Expand Housing Ombudsman, increasing powers, quicker decisions and stronger action against landlords.
- Requirement landlords to self assess against Ombudsman code.
- Publicising the cases determined

To be treated with respect

- Regulator to proactively monitor and drives landlords' compliance with improved consumer standard and code of practice.
- Remove 'serious detriment test' and introduce routine inspections for the landlords every four years.
- Regulator's objectives to explicitly cover safety and transparency, and review its consumer standards
- 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 remove the cap on the level of fines it can issue introducing Performance Improvement Plans for failing to comply, reduced notice periods for surveys and a new power to arrange emergency repairs where systemic failures are uncovered.
- Hold local authorities to account as landlords, including how they manage Arms Length Management Organisations and Tenant Management Organisations, to make sure they deliver a good service to tenants. The statutory Right to Manage will be reviewed.
- Regulator to set up an Advisory Committee to provide independent and unbiased advice on discharging its functions

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 social housing 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 ensuring staff have the right skills and approach

To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in

- Review the Decent Homes Standard to ensure it is delivering what is needed for safety and decency, 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.
- Consider the results of the allocations evidence collection exercise findings to ensure that housing is allocated in the fairest way possible and achieves the best outcomes for local places and communities.
- Encouraging social landlords to adopt pet's policies which can support wellbeing and bring comfort to peoples lives.
- Ensure staff are equipped to work with people with mental health needs and domestic violence.

To be supported in your first step to ownership

- Investing £11.5 billion to build up to 180,000 affordable homes
- Implementing a new, fairer and more accessible model for Shared Ownership which reduces the initial ownership stake from 25% to 10% and allows the purchase of further shares in smaller instalments as little as 1%. This also includes a 10 year repair free period. .
- 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.
- The restriction of ground rents on future leases to zero, banning of new leasehold houses, strengthening redress, making it quicker and easier, cheaper to extend lease or buy a freehold. Ensuring service charges are transparent and communicated effectively.

Our action plan (Appendix 1)

Our action plan provides details of:

- Where we meet with the proposed charter requirements and any further actions we need to take.
- Where we do not currently meet with the charter requirements and actions we are taking to address these areas
- Where Charter requirements are yet to be determined / developed by the Regulator and we are awaiting notification

How we compare

- We have made plans to strengthen, review and restructure our Asset team increasing capacity and specialist knowledge to meet the emerging legislation and actions identified within the Charter.
- We have a comprehensive menu of engagement, consultation, shaping, scrutiny and resident voice however we have commenced a review of our Resident engagement strategy.
- We have put in place an interim restructure for our Communities Team to strengthen our resources which will help us meet the emerging consumer regulation and new standard.
- We have reviewed how we report to residents on how we are performing introducing a performance dashboard and are strengthening our Health & Safety reporting.
- We are in the process of evaluating and considering different options for training and development of staff including professional qualifications.

How we compare

- We have commenced and are nearing completion of a stock condition survey and will need to develop an investment plan and asset strategy to ensure our homes meet the Decent Homes Standard
- Review the content of our Annual report ensuring it meets best practice and the requirements of the regulator
- Review our website ensuring it meets the needs of all our stakeholders
- Continue to strengthen our reporting to the Board so they have sufficient oversight and assurance.
- Implement the findings of the Resident engagement strategy review
- Implement the actions identified within the Consumer standards self assessment
- Act on the findings of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures
- Review our ASB policy and procedures
- Make plans to prepare for future inspections by the regulator

Recommendations

- Members note and agree the report, action plan and content of the presentation.