

“A new deal for social housing”

Green Paper from MHCLG August 2018

Consultation period to 6 November 2018

Selected questions for response set out in bold

Chapter 1- Ensuring homes are safe and decent

- 1. Are there any changes to what constitutes a Decent Home that we should consider?**

The introduction of the Decent Homes Standard made a significant difference to the quality of existing stock. However, the component based approach does not always lead to the best outcome for residents. The Housing Forum would like to see a greater emphasis on affordable warmth, connectivity and an approach that considers a standard for place as well as individual property.

- 2. Do we need additional measures to make sure social homes are safe and decent?**

Safety is paramount. We will support any additional measures resulting from the Hackitt Review and Grenfell Inquiry

- 3. Should we introduce a new criterion to the Affordable Homes Programme that reflects residents' experience of their landlord? What other ways could we incentivise best practice and deter the worst, including for those providers that do not use Government funding to build?**

We recognise the need to encourage landlords to deliver services which meet residents' needs and ensure they are treated like any valued customers. We do not believe linking this to the AHP is a sensible option and would be opposed to this.

- 4. Would there be interest in a programme to promote the transfer of local authority housing, particularly to community-based housing associations? What would it need to make it work?**

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We believe those local authorities that wished to transfer stock have done so. We do not anticipate would be a great interest in this.

5. What other ways can planning guidance support good design in the social sector?

Planning guidance could support good design in a number of ways. The Housing Forum is in favour of tenure neutral design, in many cases space standards for social homes are better, but money is saved on detailing and finish. While internally, finishes for a rented property will be different, externally they should be indistinguishable and block location should also be considered as affordable housing tends to be situated on the least desirable part of the site. However this approach needs to take into account the cost of managing communal space and public realm – particularly on high-rise mixed use schemes. Central prescription of technological approaches to reducing carbon emissions would allow for more standardisation of the approach to energy efficiency.

6. How can we encourage social housing residents to be involved in the planning and design of new developments?

All stakeholders in a neighbourhood should be encouraged to participate in planning and design of new developments. Whatever the tenure, residents will only wish to be involved where the new development has relevance to them. Find out what residents really care about – talk to them, identify themes, use that to create a survey to get more input. Create it from the bottom up with things they care about now. If these things are important now, they probably will be in the future.

Don't offer something untested in terms of viability or put an offer on the table which you later have to take away again. Don't start with design. Get to know people and build trust first.

There is some tension between the need to engage and the drive to use MMC. The benefits of reduced disruption, speed of delivery and quality need to be emphasised.

7. Recognising the need for fiscal responsibility, this Green Paper seeks views on whether the Government's current arrangements strike the right balance between providing grant funding for housing associations and Housing Revenue Account borrowing for local authorities.

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We are delighted that issues we raised in our report around certainty of funding have been tackled. We also welcome the announcement that the HRA Cap will be abolished. We believe this will open the way more a significant programme of Council led housing.

8. How we can boost community-led housing and overcome the barriers communities experience to developing new community owned homes?

We back the Community Land Trust Network's call for the Government to extend the Community Housing Fund - opened for bids this summer - past 2020. The green paper notes the need for longer term funding certainty for housing associations, and that short term funding makes it harder to build up a pipeline and deliver good value for money. This is particularly true of the community led sector, and an 18 month fund is insufficient.

9. What level of additional affordable housing, over existing investment plans, could be delivered by social housing providers if they were given longer term certainty over funding?

This is hard to quantify, but there is no doubt that certainty enables organisations to better plan their pipeline and make longer term commitments to large projects. We believe the strategic partnerships between Homes England and the GLA and housing providers will make it possible to increase the number of homes delivered by the sector from 65000 to 100,000 p.a.

10. How can we best support providers to develop new shared ownership products that enable people to build up more equity in their homes?

We would welcome the adoption of the 1% increment Shared Ownership model developed by our members Metropolitan Thames Valley. Government can best support through providing clear public information, simplifying branding and dealing with concerns over the leasehold tenure.

We also welcome moves to restrict the Help to Buy product to first time buyers.

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