

## **WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **HOUSING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**18 SEPTEMBER 2018**

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#### **Title:**

### **A NEW DEAL FOR SOCIAL HOUSING**

**[Portfolio Holder: Cllr King]**

**[Wards Affected: All]**

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#### **Summary and purpose:**

This report presents the Government's green paper "A New Deal for Social Housing" to the committee for consideration. The paper highlights five principles to improve social housing. The Committee have the opportunity to feedback on the consultation themes and questions to inform future social housing legislation, regulation and standards. The paper may also identify areas of interest and scrutiny for the Committee's future workplan.

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#### **How this report relates to the Council's Corporate Priorities:**

Social housing relates to all three Corporate priorities, People, Place and Prosperity. The provision of social housing provides secure, safe and affordable homes for people to thrive and support the economy.

#### **Financial Implications:**

There are no direct financial implications to this report as the green paper is to consider the regulatory framework around delivering good quality and safe social homes. If the proposals outlined in the green paper are adopted there will likely be financial implications.

#### **Legal Implications:**

There are no direct legal implications associated with this report.

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#### **Background**

1. The government published its green paper on social housing – ["A new deal for social housing"](#) on 14 August 2018. It sets out a proposed strategy for reforming social housing (some four million homes).
2. The paper was commissioned following the devastating fire at Grenfell Tower and has been informed by the feedback gained at ministerial roadshows to meet tenants and landlords and via online responses. The research found that nationally some tenants feel ignored and stigmatised and that some landlords are perceived as remote, unaccountable and uninterested.

3. The paper aims to rebalance the relationship between landlords and residents, tackle stigma and ensure social housing can act as a stable base and support social mobility.

## **Principles**

4. To underpin a new, fairer deal for social housing residents, the paper identifies five principles:
  - Ensuring homes are safe and decent;
  - Effective resolution of complaints;
  - Empowering residents and strengthening the Regulator;
  - Tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities; and
  - Expanding supply and supporting home ownership.

### **Principle One: ensuring homes are safe and decent**

5. The government recognises that a safe and decent home is fundamental to a sense of security and ability to get on in life.
6. The proposals are to:
  - implement the recommendations from the Hackitt Review on building regulations and fire safety;
  - establish a pilot to trial options to improve communication and engagement with residents on safety issues; and
  - review the decent homes standard, which could include new requirements for energy efficiency and fire safety as in the private rented sector
7. Waverley has a commitment through the HRA Business Plan, Asset Management Strategy and Tenancy Agreement to provide good quality homes. There is a robust health and safety programme to complete checks and rectify arising issues regarding fire, gas and electrical safety, asbestos and legionella. The capital works rolling programme maintains our homes condition and supports the decent homes standard.
8. It is recognised across the housing sector that the decent homes standard does not address all factors to ensure safe and decent homes eg footpaths, energy efficiency. Waverley welcomes the review and guidance on tenant communications regarding safety issues to assist in ensuring tenants are listened to and homes kept safe.

### **Principle Two: effective resolution of complaints**

9. The Government are seeking views on options to improve and speed up how complaints are resolved.
10. The proposals include:
  - removing barriers to redress – consider ways to improve mediation, review ‘designated person’ requirement and reduce waiting period to Housing Ombudsman;
  - supporting residents to raise complaints - looking at ways to raise awareness of tenants rights and how to make a complaint; and

- speeding up the complaints process - looking at ways to improve landlords internal processes and quality of responses.
11. Waverley closely monitors and manages performance regarding complaints and has seen improved performance over recent years. There has been a reduction in the number of complaints through working proactively with our contractors to prevent and address common complaints.
  12. The new Corporate complaints scheme has reduced the complaints process from three to two stages, thus promoting earlier resolution and delegating restitution actions or payments to the Head of Service. Level one complaints target response is ten working days and level two 15 working days. Waverley welcomes feedback to support continuous improvement, provides complaints performance data for scrutiny and publishes the complaints process. We seek ways to ensure tenants have easy access and confidence to make complaints.
  13. Reviewing the feedback from the ministerial roadshows and some of Waverley's more complex complaints, we acknowledge the need to ensure all tenants receive clear and prompt replies to complaints. We welcome the review of the democratic filter and considerations to standardised processes across the sector with national guidance.

### **Principle Three: empowering residents and strengthening the regulator**

14. The government wishes to empower residents and ensure their voices are heard so that landlords are held to account.
15. The proposals include:
  - arming residents with landlord information – considering key performance data for regular publication and league tables which could be taken into account in funding applications;
  - ensuring voices are heard - considering options for a national tenants voice;
  - strengthen choice over services – right to manage, stock transfer to community HAs, community leadership, mutual organisation; and
  - a stronger regulator - strengthening regulation of consumer standards and a separate call for evidence regarding the regulator.
16. The committee received a comprehensive report in July on the tenant involvement activities supported by the housing service to co-regulate and inform service decisions. Including the consultation on change in tenancy agreement clauses and views to inform the repairs and maintenance procurement.
17. As a local authority landlord, the service is held to account through the Members election process and over recent years the housing regulator has been “light touch”. There has been little or no interest from tenants to self manage or stock transfer.
18. The consultation paper provides the opportunity to consider the future regulation of housing services and ensure that residents' views are central to the provision of services. We welcome the review to raise overall service standards in the social housing sector.

## **Principle Four: tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities**

19. The government is committed to empowering residents and ensuring their voices are heard so that landlords are held to account

20. The proposals include:

- celebrating thriving communities - supporting community events and initiatives;
- embedding good customer service and neighbourhood management - encouraging greater levels of professionalism and customer service culture; and
- promoting good design - further guidance on National Planning Policy Framework to encourage same design standards across tenures.

21. The Community Development Team and Tenants Engagement officer work within communities to improve environments and neighbourhoods. These outcomes are published through the tenants' newsletter. We recognise that these "human interest stories" of council housing and communities could be more widely promoted and celebrated.

22. The Housing Service is committed to customer care working to put the customer first in delivering good quality homes and services. The new Housing Customer Service Team is promoting and delivering improved customer services.

23. The 2017 STAR tenants' survey reported that 83% of tenants were satisfied with the housing service and seeks continuous improvement to develop tenants' experience of services including online services.

24. 23 members of the housing service are Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) members and seeking a professional qualification is positively encouraged.

25. The Committee conducted a scrutiny review to develop design standards for new homes promoting good quality design and aesthetics. Waverley's new homes at Church View, Station Road, Godalming won the Best Social or Affordable Housing Scheme at the LABC South East Building Excellence Awards for the South East Region in June 2017.

26. Principle four echoes the "challenge stigma" message from the CIH in their Rethinking Social housing report which we support.

## **Principle Five: expanding supply and supporting home ownership**

27. The Government aims to ensure we build the social homes that we need and ensure that those homes can act as a springboard to home ownership.

28. The proposals include:

- supporting local authorities to build more – consider raising the borrowing cap, flexibility of right to buy receipts (separate consultation paper), remove plans for LAs to sell high value assets;
- explore ways to support community led house building – consider how to boost community led housing and support resident led estate regeneration;
- helping Housing Associations and others deliver more affordable homes – reflect on longer term funding arrangements stop start five year cycle;

- ensure existing social housing used effectively - remove plans for all LAs to offer fixed term tenancies, remove high value sale initiative and ensure existing tenants' victim of DA always able to retain lifetime tenancy; and
- ensuring social housing is a spring board to homeownership – explore options for voluntary right to buy, portable discounts and flexible shared ownership to increase stake in home.

29. Waverley has a programme of new homes delivery and welcomes the opportunity to consider developing more homes with funding changes.

30. Surrey Community Housing Hub is supported by Waverley to explore a range of vehicles for local groups to develop new homes.

31. There is a small Waverley shared ownership portfolio of around 50 homes from historic schemes and current interested applicants are referred to the Help to Buy agent for shared ownership opportunities.

32. We welcome the plans to increase supply and removal of requirement to sell high value vacant homes.

### **Consultation**

33. The green paper was designed to prompt a national discussion on the Government's proposals and everyone had the opportunity to comment. The 12 week consultation period ends 6 November 2018.

34. The full consultation questions can be found at Annexe One. There are total of 55 questions the majority (31) relating to principle three empowering residents and strengthening the regulator.

### **Conclusion**

35. The green paper has been broadly welcomed with the focus on tenants and customer care however the lack of additional finances for new social housing and focus on home ownership may detract from aim to rebalance landlord and resident relationships.

36. The paper reflects the themes from the CIH rethinking social housing and supports the aim for social housing to be recognised and valued as a “central pillar of the welfare state”.

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### **Recommendation**

It is recommended that the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

1. notes the scope and themes of the consultation paper;
  2. provides feedback on the consultation questions; and
  3. considers and identifies suggested scrutiny areas for the Committee's future workplan.
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## Background Papers

There are no background papers (as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) relating to this report.

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