

Landmark reforms to improve social housing and give residents a greater voice

- New Charter gives social housing residents a greater voice
- Tougher housing regulator to ensure high standards from landlords
- Strengthened Housing Ombudsman to speed up the handling of complaints

Major reforms to support housing tenants in England and ensure landlords raise standards where needed have been announced today (17 November 2020) by the Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick.

The social housing white paper – ‘The Charter for Social Housing Residents’, sets out reforms that will speed up the complaints procedure for residents by improving access to the Housing Ombudsman, reducing decision times and ensuring effective resolution.

The Charter will also make landlords more accountable for the services they deliver, including access to a new information scheme for tenants of housing associations and introducing a set of tenant satisfaction measures that landlords will have to report against.

The social housing white paper delivers on the government’s manifesto pledge to provide greater redress, better regulation and improve the quality of social housing.

Shaped by the views of residents across England, including the survivors and bereaved family members of the Grenfell Tower tragedy, it also includes a new Charter setting out what every social housing resident should expect from their landlord:

- 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.

The white paper sets out what the government will do to ensure landlords deliver this change. Most significantly, the government is reforming the Regulator of Social Housing and Housing Ombudsman service to drive the culture change required, backed by legislation where needed.

Alongside publishing the white paper, the Housing Secretary also announced a consultation on mandating smoke and carbon monoxide alarms in all rental homes.

The social housing green paper consultation response and response to the call for evidence on the review of regulation is also published today.

Housing Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

We are delivering on the commitment we made to the Grenfell community that, never again, would the voices of residents go unheard. This white paper will bring transformational change for social housing residents, giving them a much stronger voice and, in doing so, re-focusing the sector on its social mission.

I want to see social housing tenants empowered by a regulatory regime and a culture of transparency, accountability, decency and service befitting of the best intentions and deep roots of social housing in this country.

The new approach and regulatory changes we set out in this white paper will make a measurable difference to the lived experiences of those living in England's 4 million social homes in the years ahead.

Carol Matthews, Riverside Group Chief Executive said:

The white paper contains a number of very sensible proposals around consumer regulation, complaint handling, sector accountability and buildings. The review of the decent homes standard is most welcome.

I am relieved that the existing social housing regulator will be expanded to fulfil the responsibilities of a proactive consumer regulator. It is right and proper that landlords should be accountable to and transparent with their customers and stakeholders.

I am certain that housing associations who have signed up to the National Housing Federation (NHF) 'Together with Tenants' programme are progressing culture change and customer experience improvements where necessary

Today's announcement will see a transformation of consumer regulation, ensuring tenants are at the heart of social housing delivery. Tenants will get access to quicker and fairer redress so that they are not waiting long months to resolve complaints.

It underlines our commitment to safer homes, with a consultation seeking the same legal protections on smoke and carbon monoxide alarms for social tenants as private renters. And this will encourage improvements to the quality of green spaces for social housing residents

The white paper also reaffirms the government's ambition to provide social housing residents with more opportunities to own their home via Right to Buy and a new Right to Shared Ownership for housing association tenants in new grant funded homes.

Today's measures follow extensive engagement and consultation with residents' and landlord groups as well as hearing directly from those most affected by the Grenfell tragedy.

They also reflect responses to the social housing green paper published in 2018, in which residents from across the country were asked for their views on social housing. Almost 1,000 tenants shared their views with ministers at 14 events across the country, with over 7,000 submitting their opinions, issues and concerns online.

Alongside publishing the white paper, the government is also announcing:

The measures contained in the social housing white paper will deliver the following:

- **Ensure that homes are safe.** We will reinforce the Regulator of Social Housing's consumer regulation objective to explicitly include safety and legislate to place an obligation on landlords to identify a nominated person responsible for ensuring compliance with health and safety requirements.
- **Increase transparency** allowing residents greater visibility of how well their landlord is performing and the decisions it is making. We will deliver a set of tenant satisfaction measures for social landlords to report against on issues that matter to tenants.
- **Ensure swift and effective resolution of complaints** by speeding up decisions. We will build on the changes already agreed with the Housing Ombudsman Service to improve its performance and reduce its decision times.
- **Transform social housing regulation** by creating a new, proactive consumer regulation regime for social housing, delivering robust oversight of all social landlords. We will establish a new arm of the

Regulator of Social Housing to proactively regulate on consumer standards including quality of homes, repairs, meaningful engagement with tenants and complaints handling.

- **Empower residents** by requiring landlords to improve tenant engagement. We will deliver new opportunities and empowerment programme for social housing residents, to support them in engaging with and holding their landlords to account.
- **Encourage investment in neighbourhood, place and decency.** We will review the Decent Homes Standard and support the quality of and access to green spaces. We will tackle anti-social behaviour by enabling tenants to know who is responsible for action and who can support and assist them.