

# STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

## HOUSING COMMITTEE

14 SEPTEMBER 2021

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>RESPONSE TO THE GOVERNMENTS SOCIAL HOUSING WHITE PAPER</b>			
<b>Purpose of Report</b>	To inform Committee of the actions that are underway and scheduled in response to the white paper and the seven strands of the Charter for Social Housing Residents.			
<b>Decision(s)</b>	<p><b>The Committee RESOLVES to agree that the Head of Housing Services work with the cross party Resident Involvement Task and Finish group to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>a) Draft Stroud District’s Tenants Charter</b></li> <li><b>b) Draft Stroud District’s Tenant Empowerment and Engagement strategy</b></li> <li><b>c) Coordinate consultation on the proposed Tenant satisfaction measures, and bring recommendations back to this Committee</b></li> </ul>			
<b>Consultation and Feedback</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing Committee Tenant Representatives</li> <li>• Neighbourhood Ambassadors,</li> <li>• SDC - Head of Contract Services,</li> <li>• SDC - Property Manager,</li> <li>• SDC - New Homes and Regeneration Manager,</li> <li>• SDC- - Head of Community Services,</li> <li>• SDC - Tenant Services Unit Managers</li> <li>• Independent Specialist Housing Management advisor (Bernadette Marjoram)</li> </ul>			
<b>Report Author</b>	Name Kevin Topping, Head of Housing Services Tel: 01453 754196 Email: <a href="mailto:kevin.topping@stroud.gov.uk">kevin.topping@stroud.gov.uk</a>			
<b>Options</b>	N/A			
<b>Background Papers</b>	<p><a href="http://www.gov.uk">The charter for social housing residents: social housing white paper - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)</a></p> <p><a href="http://www.gov.uk">Social housing green paper: a ‘new deal’ for social housing - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)</a></p>			
<b>Appendices</b>	Appendix A – The Charter for Social Housing Residents Appendix B – Requirements of the Charter Appendix C – Draft Tenant Satisfaction Measures Appendix D – NHF Together with Tenants Charter			
<b>Implications (further details at the end of the report)</b>	Financial	Legal	Equality	Environmental
	No	No	No	No

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Social Housing White Paper 2020 sets out a new Charter for Social Housing Residents. It builds on the proposals set out in the Social Housing Green Paper: 'A new deal for social housing residents' (2020), the Review of Social Housing Regulation and of course the learning from the Grenfell Tower Tragedy.
- 1.2 The Regulator of Social Housing wrote to all local authority Chief Executives in March 2021 outlining that while much of the responsibility for delivering the expectations set out in the White Paper rests with social landlords, its implementation will be underpinned by a strengthened consumer regulation regime. This regime will build on the existing *reactive* consumer regulation role and standards which all social landlords, including local authorities, are currently subject to.

## 2. Government focus and purpose of the white paper;

### 2.1 The White Papers seeks to:

- Provide clarity on the standards that every social tenant in England is entitled to expect from their landlords.
- Raise the standard of social housing and meet the housing aspirations of residents now and in the future.
- Engender quality, safe environments free from crime & anti-social behaviour.
- Ensure tenants feel protected and empowered by a regulatory regime and a culture of transparency, accountability, decency and service befitting the intentions and traditions of social housing.
- Provide routes to self-ownership.

### 2.2 The White Paper's charter addresses the relationship between landlord and tenant, and how landlords can work with their tenants more effectively. The Regulator considers that the consumer regime must pass three tests for it to be successful:

1. It must make a meaningful difference to tenants.
2. It must be deliverable by landlords, whether housing association or local authority landlords.
3. We must be able to regulate it effectively.

### 2.3 It confirms that the Regulator of Social Housing will focus on the following areas:

- Changes needed to the consumer standards that all social landlords will be required to meet.
- The proactive consumer regulation activity (including, for example, a programme of inspections as outlined in the White Paper) through which we will monitor and assess whether those standards are being met; and
- Agreeing a set of tenant satisfaction measures that will both inform our regulation and help tenants hold their landlords to account.

### **3. Current Position**

- 3.1 A number of Stroud District Council current work streams already link directly to this, with work either proposed, in progress or completed.
- 3.2 The Tenant Service Standards action plan and the Cleaner Estates action plan identify areas where greater tenant involvement is being prioritised, including scrutiny, complaints and repairs. Recent task and finish groups are also in place covering resident involvement, voids and repairs and energy/retrofit.
- 3.3 In unison with these, there is commissioned work around resident involvement, Strategic Housing and landlord services. Complaints reports for the whole service have been shared with Housing Committee performance scrutiny members and Tenant Representatives.
- 3.4 Whilst the White paper has wide ranging implications for all social landlords, there are several areas where, as a sector, good progress has already been made that can be built on. This includes:
- Since the Grenfell tragedy there has been an increasing focus on the strength of Tenants and Residents voice and influence in providers' strategic decision making.
  - The appointment of new tenant representatives on Housing Committee (two principals and two deputies) is an early step to enhance tenant engagement and opportunities for a voice in committee.
  - There has been a similar focus on improving customer satisfaction through improved engagement and customer experience mapping. This work is ongoing through property care and the insight officer who is assimilating this information for reporting purposes.
  - Approaches to complaint management have been reviewed in the light of the new Housing Ombudsman code with processes and policies being updated to comply with the new Code, reducing processes to two stages (Stroud has a new corporate complaints management process which was built heavily based on the work of Tenant Services management of Complaints and is compliant with the Ombudsman's requirements), complaints information for 2020/2021 and the first quarter of 2021 have been shared with the Performance members and tenant representatives.
  - There has been a refreshed focus by the Tenant Services team on the Government's decent homes standard, that SDC having exceeded through their own enhanced standard.

### **4. Key challenges and opportunities:**

- 4.1 Although some progress has been made over recent months' work remains to be done and there are a number of challenges to addresses. Many areas are still open to consultation with opportunities to influence and ensure our residents voices are heard. Issues for particular attention moving forward include:
- Improving access to our services through a strong and accessible digital offer.
  - Re-designing service delivery in the light of the Covid experience and the focus on Safety, ASB, Domestic Abuse.

- Supporting the shared focus with Housing Committee on inclusion, respect and tackling social housing stigma.
- Creating a stronger focus on Consumer regulation requirements alongside Financial Viability and Governance.
- Ensuring resident and community engagement is meaningful and inclusive.
- Recognising the particular challenges delivering quality services in consultation with tenants in high-risk buildings and where the design, age and building materials of existing tenants' homes does not meet new health and safety requirements.
- Working with and supporting tenants in meeting our climate change and energy efficiency targets.

4.2 Going forward the focus for all social housing providers is on working constructively with the Regulator to help shape the detail behind the charter and the regulatory changes, through consultation events and workshops and to review their current position against the requirements.

4.3 This is against the backdrop of delivering services during the Covid pandemic, reviewing the learning from the last 18 months and understanding what this means for future service delivery. The white paper supports and is supported by current and evolving legislation and regulation, including;

4.4 **The Building Safety Bill (2020)** – which seeks to create an enhanced regulatory regime for all buildings, covering the design, construction, day-to-day management and maintenance of higher-risk buildings, with residents having a strong voice in the system. Requiring providers to ensure they create and embed a culture of engagement with fire and building safety.

4.5 Culture is referred to 23 times within the white paper- “drive a culture change to put safety first” “develop a national culture of engagement on fire and structural safety for residents of all tenures” “supports a culture change whereby landlords are more open with tenants” “ensure that the needs of tenants are embedded in the culture of all landlords” There is a real focus on embedding change across the sector and we must not forget that we are all part of the journey.

4.6 **Feedback from involved tenants included:**

- I have read through this and I think it looks great. I hope it doesn't create too much extra work for the Council but will formalise some of the things that you already do. I am aware that right to buy is an issue for all councils because of the very unfair return of funds and councils are constantly squeezed by the government and constantly concerned about the budget. None of this is touched upon in the White paper and I know Stroud runs a very reasonable budget with good quality planning for the future. Sadly, I don't think it is likely to be recognised nor rewarded by the government. Nonetheless I think the white paper is quite good and should allow the council and it's tenants to cooperate in a mutually beneficial way.
- I'm wary that this new Charter is a way of getting Housing Association rules in to change the way things are being run to be more like Housing Association than Council run. The way things have been recently I don't believe Tenants have been listened to the way they should have been. I have reported a couple of things from this estate several times and nothing has been done about them. So, as long as we're not being pushed towards a Housing Association, I would be happy for an

honest, clear Charter, that genuinely means what it says, and not just something that is just a load of words that will be ignored. I'd just like to see SDC back to the decent, honest Council it was, when tenants could get satisfaction

- I have read it and have no comments.
- I have read through the paper and all seems to make sense to me
- Yes, I have read it, it sounds good if it is worked properly.
- Thank you for the opportunity to review the response to the social housing white paper. It is a very comprehensive response to numerous complex requirements I am very supportive of responses.
- I would note that following the tenant involvement currently reported in 3.1 and 3.2 paints a picture of a lot of activity taking place whilst I have been involved in some tenant activities I find that what is reported to be taking place is not shared adequately with tenants.
- I have been asking for scrutiny for a number of years however I see it is reported to have taken place in some areas.
- I believe that there is always a tremendous amount of professional work put into planning by officers for tenant involvement however question the ability of officers to see all actions through and provide feedback and post review due to lack of staff resources.
- Feedback from meetings and outcomes and agreements need to be followed up on otherwise tenants can be asking the same questions a year later
- How many times have tenant inspectors started and stopped it is difficult to maintain tenant interest when this stop start happens.
- From experience more support is required for tenant representatives. Officers need to have time and resources for this if these new requirements are to be supported and tenants encouraged to participate.
- I have reported some concerns we as tenants had during the height of Covid only to be advised that there is no problem. I would hope that this type of response would be avoided in the future under the new guidelines.

## **5. Next Steps**

- 5.1 Stroud District Council Tenants should have and deserve a strong relevant Tenant Charter. It is appropriate based on those produced by the National Housing Federation (APP D) outlining its commitments to residents and which are based on the following cornerstones:
- Relationships
  - Communication
  - Voice and influence
  - Accountability and Transparency
  - Quality
  - What happens when things go wrong
- 5.2 The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Task and Finish Group is in a position to lead and develop a Stroud tenants charter as part of their remit and feed back to Housing Committee as appropriate.
- 5.3 A draft satisfaction regime outlined at APPENDIX C is shared with tenants before embedding them into the performance culture that we are seeking to enhance.

## **6. Implications**

### **6.1 Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications arising from this report. Any financial outlay identified within this commentary will be met from existing budget.

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### **6.2 Legal Implications**

There are no direct legal implications arising from the report and its recommendations.

One Legal

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### **6.3 Equality Implications**

An EqIA has been carried out by Officers in relation to the decision made in this report and no equality implications arise.

### **6.4 Environmental Implications**

There are no significant implications within this category.