

The Social Housing White Paper Professionalisation Review

To: All Chief Executives, Main Contacts and APSE Contacts in England,

For Information: Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

Key Points

On 18 January 2022, the government announced the Social Housing White Paper Professionalisation Review.

It is reported that the review will focus on reviewing staff training and qualifications to improve social housing services and ensure residents' complaints are dealt with effectively.

1.0 Background

The [Charter for social housing residents: Social Housing White Paper](#) was published in November 2020, following the Grenfell tragedy and in response to thousands of social housing residents telling the government that they felt their landlords were failing to treat them with courtesy and respect.

It also follows the latest English Housing Survey report, which shows that more than 59% of social housing residents who complained were not happy with the response to their complaint. At the same time, the Housing Ombudsman has seen a 139% increase in complaints in the past year.

The charter sets out what every social housing resident should be able to expect including how the government would ensure residents in social housing were safe, listened to, live in good quality homes, and had access to redress when things go wrong.

This briefing provides an overview of the proposed next steps the government has announced to support the aims set out in the charter.

2.0 The Social Housing White Paper Professionalisation Review

The Minister for Rough Sleeping and Housing Eddie Hughes MP announced on 18 January the Social Housing White Paper Professionalisation Review.

As part of the announcement, it was reported that the review on qualifications and professional training will drive up standards by making sure social housing staff are better equipped to support tenants, deal effectively with complaints, and make sure homes are of good quality.

It was confirmed that the Social Housing White Paper Professionalisation Review will explore the qualifications currently available for staff, with landlords, residents, and trade bodies putting forward recommendations to the government. It will also consider if additional training is required to improve the service to residents.

The government is now urging social housing residents to come forward and have their say in the review and talk about their experience dealing with social housing staff. It is advised that they can also suggest what changes they would like to see.

In addition, as part of its work to implement the Charter, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities is [reviewing the Decent Homes Standard](#), which sets out what makes a good and decent home, and is considering whether this needs to be updated.

It is commented that crucially, the Charter will make sure tenants know how to raise concerns when things go wrong and can be confident that their landlord will make things right. As soon as practicable the government intends to bring forth legislation to strengthen consumer regulation of the sector.

The working group will include representatives from the Chartered Institute for Housing, tenant engagement experts TPAS as well as North Star Housing Group and Sanctuary Housing.

Landlords, residents and other interested parties can contribute to the Social Housing White Paper Professionalisation Review by emailing: Professionalisation.Review@communities.gov.uk.

APSE COMMENT

Landlords are not just providing a service, they are providing a home, the quality of which has an impact on all aspects of an individual's life. Therefore, it is paramount that housing providers have robust mechanisms in place to allow tenants to raise concerns and complaints and for these to be responded to and addressed in a timely, professional and appropriate manner.

APSE supports the Social Housing White Paper Professionalisation Review as identifying gaps in knowledge, ensuring appropriate training and equipping staff with the tools required to support tenants is a practical approach to assist in meeting the aims of the charter.

The review announced is only one aspect of a much wider picture. The Grenfell Tragedy and COVID-19 pandemic have served to highlight and bring into sharp focus the impact on individuals, families and communities from decades of the undersupply of good quality, affordable housing with stable tenures.

APSE research in collaboration with the TCPA, '[At a crossroads: building foundations for healthy community](#)' and recent research commissioned by UNISON and conducted by APSE, '[A decent place to live: Homes fit for key workers](#)', illustrate the current issues and how quality housing is a fundamental ingredient in building healthy communities and the benefits for wider society.

The recent increase in the cost of living, the predicted rises in energy bills and private sector rents rising at their highest rate in 13 years will all serve to put further pressure on local authorities, increasing waiting lists for social housing and forcing tenants into substandard, expensive and inadequate housing.

Local authorities have demonstrated that they have the ability to build new quality housing that meets the needs of their communities. In addition, councils are embarking on retrofit decarbonisation programmes to ensure existing housing is fit for the future. They are taking steps such as improving insulation which in turn is also mitigating some of the impacts of the hike in energy prices and assists tenants who experience fuel poverty.

Therefore, APSE believes that the government need to act and provide local authorities with adequate long-term funding to enable councils to build and retrofit homes to address the decades of reliance on the private sector and underinvestment by the government and the chronic lack of supply.

On a final point, the training of social housing staff supporting tenants is important. This also needs to go hand in hand with a strategy that ensures there are the required skills and resources in the construction sector, to ensure that there are tradespeople who have the relevant experience and knowledge to rectify issues raised by tenants such as broken boilers. This strategy also needs to ensure the trades have the skills to install and maintain the emerging green technologies such as ground source heat pumps.

The [APSE Housing, construction and building maintenance advisory group](#) supports officers and members who are responsible for services related to the maintenance, management and construction of both social housing and civic buildings. Previous meetings have addressed issues such as retrofitting, void management, reactive repairs, service improvement, joint purchasing, and procurement.