



Member briefing: Better Social Housing Review

Introduction

On 13th of December 2022, the [Better Social Housing Review \(BSHR\)](#) published their report on the quality of social housing in England. The National Housing Federation (NHF) and Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) commissioned the report and an [independent panel was appointed to conduct the review](#), chaired by Helen Baker, who is currently chair of Shelter. The report follows the tragic news of Awaab Ishak's death, caused by exposure to mould in his home.

This report makes 7 recommendations to improve the quality of social housing provisions in England. Recommendations cover issues including core purpose, data (understanding the scale and nature of issues), tenant voice, multi-agency working, training and monitoring progress.

The review structured their investigations around two key pillars which were top priorities for those living in social housing: i) the suitability and quality of housing stock, and ii) the housing association's culture and responsiveness to tenants' concerns and complaints.

CHC has prepared the following briefing for members sharing the report's recommendations and key messages.

Recommendations

The report makes [7 recommendations](#):

1. Every housing association, and the sector as a whole should refocus on their core purpose and deliver against it.
2. Housing associations should work together to conduct and publish a thorough audit of all social housing in England



3. Housing associations should partner with tenants, contractors and frontline staff to develop and apply new standards of defining what an excellent maintenance and repairs process looks like
4. The Chartered Institute of Housing should promote the traditional officer role as supported and valued employment opportunity with a Chartered Institute of Housing recognised programme of training and continuing development.
5. Housing associations should work with all tenants to ensure that they have a voice and influence at every level of decision making across the organisation through both voluntary and paid roles.
6. Housing associations should develop a proactive local community presence through community hubs which foster greater multi agency working.
7. Housing associations should support tenants and frontline staff to undertake an annual review of the progress each organisation is making in implementing this review's recommendations.

Key issues identified

Operating environment

Throughout the report, the external challenges and competing demands faced by housing associations are recognised, including delivering new housing stock to cope with unprecedented demand, retrofitting existing stock to work towards net zero targets and delivering innovative solutions to the climate crisis through developing sustainably. It also points to decisions taken by the UK Government as exacerbating these challenges.

However, an overarching message of the report is to 'go back to basics' and revisit core purpose - "to provide decent, safe homes for those who can't afford the market". The report outlines three essential elements to this core purpose: tenants, stock and staff. The report argues that only once "housing associations can demonstrate that they are delivering against that purpose they should then review again what further capacity they have available to continue to deliver against wider responsibilities and ambitions".

Inequalities

The report is explicit that "Structural inequalities and racism are threads that run throughout the report and tackling them has underpinned all the recommendations the panel is making." The review found that many tenants faced structural inequalities, particularly those from black and minority ethnic groups. It found that black and minority ethnic groups are more likely to live in homes that have problems with damp, mould and condensation and are disproportionately affected by issues such as overcrowding, unsafe housing conditions and concentration of housing in the most deprived areas. The review found that 62 housing associations have all white executive teams, and that black and



minorities are excluded from decision making. The report challenges housing associations in England to ensure they are more accessible and connected with tenants and the wider community so that tenants can turn to them in times of difficulty. The report sums up this approach as 'go where the tenants go'.

Listening to and involving tenants

Through its recommendations the report emphasises the need for housing associations to be transparent, responsive and approachable in all matters. An overall message throughout the report is to take a proactive, rather than reactive, approach to service delivery. The report also highlights the need to engage tenants in service delivery and evaluation, as well as "every level of decision making across the organisation through both voluntary and paid roles".

Data and evaluation

The report finds that there is currently no comprehensive, consistently measured picture of the state of social housing across England. The report finds a disconnect between self-reported compliance (99%) and actual reported compliance as found by the English Housing Survey (88.7%). The review calls on housing associations to work together to collect good data around housing quality repairs, and monitor progress against this baseline understanding of issues. The report highlights the role the Social Housing Regulator has in issues of housing quality and disrepair in England, and welcomes plans for the Regulator to have increased power through the [Social Housing Regulation Bill](#).

Training, development and recruitment

The recommendations recognise challenges in recruitment and retention across the housing sector. The report champions the important role of the housing officer as staff in communities who can build long-lasting relationships with tenants and warns associations of using technologies which reduces face to face connection with community members. This report calls on the sector to consider how they can value and reward staff members to reduce staff turnover. The report describes a 'snakes and ladders effect' where a tenant makes progress with one housing officer just for a new staff member to replace the role and the engagement and support needs to start from scratch. The report also emphasises the need for a values based approach to recruitment.

Next steps

CHC welcomes the important work of the review panel into social housing in England. We are discussing the findings with CiH Cymru, as well as other organisations and will consider seriously how we can learn from the recommendations the panel has made, and take action within the Welsh context.

We will continue to talk to partners about next steps and will also use the Strategic Delivery Group Meetings early next year to discuss this issue with our Members.



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