

The **Better** _____
Social Housing
Review _____



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INTRODUCTION

We believe that good quality housing is a basic human right. The places that we call home have a significant impact on our health and happiness and on what we can achieve in our lives.

Housing associations collectively provide homes to around six million people. When social housing works best, it creates good quality, safe and secure homes for individuals and families to thrive in, in strong communities.

Throughout our review, we've seen inspiring examples of social housing that is achieving exactly that.

However, it is not always the case and too many people are now living in housing which doesn't live up to these ambitions.

The adverse effects this can have on tenants' physical and mental health and wellbeing are profound and sometimes tragic. The Grenfell Tower disaster and the subsequent inquiry clearly evidenced how an entire community can be catastrophically let down, exposing fundamental racial inequalities and discrimination.

Yet the disturbing news stories continue. Just last month, we read the shocking finding that the death of two-year-old Awaab Ishak was due to a severe respiratory condition caused by exposure to untreated mould whilst living in a social housing property.

The coroner told the BBC that this "should be a defining moment for the housing sector."¹ The National Housing

Federation have consulted their members on proposals to take action on this. They have also consulted on the proposal for 'Awaab's law' and committed to working with other stakeholders to develop and set specific targets around it.

Recent media reports have highlighted many other cases of poor quality housing up and down the country. Daniel Hewitt's investigations for ITN and Kwajo Twenebo's social media campaigns have exposed footage and photos of properties with a wide range of issues relating to damp, mould, leaks, inadequate ventilation, pests, overcrowding and more. When such problems go unresolved and are compounded by a lack of response or disrespectful communication from landlords, the impacts can be devastating and destroy lives. The desperate and growing shortage of social housing nationally makes it even more critical that the stock which is available is of a decent standard as tenants inevitably have so little choice.

The Better Social Housing Review was set up by the National Housing Federation and Chartered Institute of Housing to examine these and other issues relating to the quality of social housing. This report is the culmination of six months of work by a panel of independent experts in social housing and includes our key findings, and recommendations.

¹ BBC News (November 2022), Awaab Ishak: Mould in Rochdale flat caused boy's death, coroner rules <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-63635721>

We have looked at the quality of social housing in England through a number of different lenses including:

- the challenges of managing and developing housing stock
- culture, complaints and communication
- stigma and discrimination
- tenant voice and power
- sustainability and climate change
- workforce
- health
- access to data and information

We structured our investigations around two key pillars which quickly emerged as the 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.

There is nothing revelatory in our findings or recommendations, but they are informed by the evidence and insights we have gathered from a huge range of different people and organisations involved in social housing. It may seem to housing associations that our recommendations are already central to their existing thinking and approach. All our recommendations have been inspired or informed by examples of good practice we have seen from housing associations, staff and tenants. They provide evidence that the provision of consistently good quality social housing and greater equity of voice and power across the sector are both possible. However, we urge every housing association to have the courage to ask themselves difficult, but necessary, questions about the reality of all the homes they provide and the service given to all their tenants, so that real progress can continue to be made.

We recognise that the context in which housing associations are operating is challenging. Imposed requirements on housing associations' expenditure have increased considerably and operating margins have decreased. The need to meet important additional standards around building safety and climate action, for example are expanding alongside the ever more urgent demand to build more homes.

England has moved from having 31% of households in social rented accommodation in 1979 to 17% in 2018/19.² This has led to the so-called 'residualisation' of social rent, meaning that this form of tenure houses those with the highest need rather than providing an affordable option to a cross-section of society. This shift is having a profound effect on tenants, those working in the sector and society as a whole. Already, a greater proportion of people who may need additional support live in this sector compared to other tenures.³ The number of tenants with more complex needs is also increasing whilst, at the same time, other sources of support in the community are falling away.

Many tenants face structural inequalities, especially people from black and minority ethnic communities, those with disabilities and single parent households. Serious concerns were raised with the panel about the systemic disadvantage still being faced by black and minority ethnic communities in particular. Structural inequalities and racism are threads that run throughout the report and tackling them has underpinned all the recommendations the panel is making.

² Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) (February 2007), Ends and means: The future roles of social housing in England by John Hills <https://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/cr/CASEREport34.pdf>

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (2018-19), English Housing Survey Headline Report, 2018-2019 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/860076/2018-19_EHS_Headline_Report.pdf

³ Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, English Housing Survey, Social Rented Sector 2020-21 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1088500/EHS20-21_Social_Rented_Sector_Report.pdf

The sector faces many external pressures. There is a cost of living crisis, and the cost of heating homes is a very real and rapidly increasing problem for many social housing tenants. The proposed rent cap is also likely to have an impact on housing associations with some parts of the social housing sector, such as supported housing or smaller specialist providers, much less able to withstand additional financial pressures. On top of this we are just emerging from a pandemic that has left the sector with supply and staffing shortages that are very challenging for housing providers to navigate and manage.

Resources and external funding are tight and increasingly uncertain. Housing associations have rightly been required to 'sweat their own assets' to support delivery of their purpose, but we have heard growing arguments that this model is fast reaching its limits. The revolving door of housing ministers has meant that there has been a lack of consistent and strategic thinking and action at a government level around housing. Funding taps have been turned on and off with minimal notice and successive governments have not invested enough in providing funding for critical areas such as regeneration. Central government may have outsourced its responsibilities for the provision of social housing, but it must recognise that it remains fully accountable for the provision of decent housing nationally and act on that responsibility as clearly as it already does in relation to health and education.

In short, housing associations have a really difficult job on their hands, and we have sought to reflect that reality in our findings and recommendations.

In developing our thinking we have built on the findings of many other reports and recommendations as well as important legislative and regulatory provisions and changes. The Social Housing Regulation Bill, with the newly proactive consumer regulation regime built on

tenant satisfaction measures; the significant work and reports of the Housing Ombudsman, in particular the report on damp and mould and the revised complaint handling code; and the recent Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Select Committee report on regulating social housing are all good examples of this. These are all very much welcomed.

With all this in mind, the panel's overriding concern is that the sector is at risk of diluting its focus on its core purpose which we take to be providing decent, safe homes for all those who can't afford the market. There are three essential elements to this core purpose: tenants, stock and staff. Thinking of this as a three legged stool, we see how crucial each of the three interdependent elements is to keeping the sector steady, balanced and effective. Under continuing pressure, however this balance can be lost.

Many tenants and other stakeholders we spoke to told us that the tenant voice and influence in particular, are no longer strong enough. It is for that reason that we have put tenants at the very centre of our thinking.

The recommendations within this report relate to those areas which our review suggests need to be held in the clearest line of sight and which are most directly relevant to protecting and progressing against this core purpose. Whilst the panel has focused its review on housing association provision across England, we hope that our recommendations may also be of value to social housing providers more generally.

THE KEY RECOMMENDATIONS IN SUMMARY



1. Every housing association, and the sector as a whole, should refocus on their core purpose and deliver against it.



In a system under pressure, housing associations need to go back to test their performance against their core purpose – to provide decent, safe homes for those who can't afford the market.

When 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.

2. Housing associations should work together to conduct and publish a thorough audit of all social housing in England.



There is currently no comprehensive, consistently measured picture of the state of social housing across the country. Different housing associations have varying approaches to auditing their stock and expressing data.

Housing associations should work together to undertake a comprehensive national audit of social housing. The panel recommends that they should do this by adopting and applying the new HACT UK Housing Data Standards right across the sector.

3. Housing associations should partner with tenants, contractors and frontline staff to develop and apply new standards defining what an excellent maintenance and repairs process looks like.



There are widespread and growing concerns about how too many housing associations manage the maintenance and repair of their housing stock and respond to concerns and complaints about this raised by tenants.

Each housing association should ask tenants, frontline staff and contractors to work together to review how the organisation deals with maintenance and repairs. They should develop new standards together to be applied to review the organisation's performance and then develop an annual plan for continuous improvement.

4. The Chartered Institute of Housing should promote the traditional housing officer⁴ role as a supported and valued employment opportunity with a Chartered Institute of Housing recognised programme of training and continuing development.



Exceptional pressures and demands on frontline staff working directly with tenants are contributing to very high turnover rates at this level and making it harder for many tenants to communicate with their landlord.

Housing associations should increase investment in recruiting, developing and supporting the retention of more housing officers to enable them to re-establish more manageable patch sizes.

⁴ The role that has traditionally been referred to as 'housing officer' is defined here as those staff who interact with tenants on a daily basis and liaise with them in regards to their properties.

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.



There are widespread concerns that tenant voice, and the diversity of that voice, can get lost in a sector under pressure where leaders can be distanced from the realities of tenant experience.

Tenants should be recognised as key partners in delivering sector purpose. All housing associations should assess their performance against tenants' experiences by empowering them to lead investigations and reviews and should expand the roles they can play across organisations.

6. Housing associations should develop a proactive local community presence through community hubs which foster greater multi-agency working.



Too many tenants are concerned about reduced face to face contact with landlords. Internal silo working and lack of commitment to external multi-agency working can reduce the efficiency and impact of associations.

Housing associations should actively seek to create more community-based hubs, either by engaging with existing ones or actively setting up new ones. These hubs should reflect the needs and aspirations of the community and be based on the principle of 'go where the tenants are.'

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.



For these recommendations to have real impact, housing associations should work with their tenants and frontline staff to examine how well they are doing in terms of implementing them and to find ways to overcome the challenges and barriers they face in doing so.

RECOMMENDATIONS IN DETAIL



1. Every housing association, and the sector as a whole, should refocus on their core purpose and deliver against it.



In a system under pressure, housing associations need to go back to test their performance against their core purpose – to provide decent, safe homes for those who can't afford the market.

When 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.

The problem and related findings

Social housing is a system under pressure.

Housing associations are increasingly struggling to manage growing external demands and expectations with the resources they have. Many at the same time risk overstretch and reduction of focus through the scale of their internal ambition to deliver social justice and equity for all tenants. One result of that ironically is that tenants' voices can too easily be drowned out by multiple immediate pressures.

The sector is required to deliver against many and, at times, competing targets. As part of managing the quality of their housing stock, many housing associations face the costs and challenges of

regenerating old and failing estates whilst at the same time meeting the increasingly urgent need to build new social housing at pace and at scale. Providers must comply with new regulations around, for example, building safety and achieving net zero. With fewer social homes available and the 'residualisation' of social housing provision, many associations are working with tenants with increasing complexity of need, in communities where other support organisations are falling away.

The government's outsourcing of responsibility for social housing has compounded these pressures. We've seen rotating government ministers, rapidly changing policy environments and unpredictable rent settlements making it harder to borrow and plan.

The focus on proactive economic regulation in pursuit of financial viability has led some housing associations to become far more commercial in their focus with increasing numbers of mergers and the temptation to count the number of new housing units built rather than tackling how to measure and perform against more complex indicators such as tenant experience and satisfaction. Larger organisations in particular face the risk of being further removed from tenants, who should, ultimately be at the heart of any housing association's social purpose.

The recommendation

The pressures of being pulled in multiple directions, and the failure to make clear choices about what to prioritise and how within limited resources, have been highlighted by stakeholders time and time again as part of our review. They have repeatedly told us that the role of housing associations is fundamentally to provide decent, safe homes for those who cannot afford the market and that this should be their immediate priority.

It is therefore time to go back to basics. Each organisation will make its own judgements on priorities in the context of its geography and communities but, as with any business, it is essential when under pressure to revisit core purpose and re-establish clarity and focus on that in order to stay on track. Housing associations need to assess how well they are delivering against those basics. It is only when there is confidence that these are being properly resourced and delivered that housing associations will then be able to make well-informed judgements about how far to extend and diversify other commitments and ambitions.

As part of this renewed purpose, the sector must do more to challenge and break down the stigma and discrimination still faced by people who live in social housing, both in society as a whole and within the social housing sector itself. The situation is worse for those individuals and groups who already face discrimination and structural inequalities in wider society such as people with disabilities and those from black and minority ethnic communities. The sector needs to serve and represent all its tenants, whatever their circumstances or backgrounds.

Some stakeholders also believe that the sector has lost its campaigning voice and is not advocating with tenants strongly enough to government, whether for additional capacity or changes to policy and legislation. Housing is an investment in society, as important as health and education yet it is not currently prioritised as such at government policy level. Stakeholders told us that for too long tenants have not had enough of a voice to seize the government's attention and demand change.

There therefore needs to be sharper and clearer agreement on core purpose at a sector level too. This should ultimately empower the sector to make stronger, more cohesive arguments to government alongside its tenants as a voice which government will need, and want to listen to.

2. Housing associations should work together to conduct and publish a thorough audit of all social housing in England.



There is currently no comprehensive, consistently measured picture of the state of social housing across the country. Different housing associations have varying approaches to auditing their stock and expressing data.

Housing associations should work together to undertake a comprehensive national audit of social housing. The panel recommends that they do this by adopting and applying the new HACT UK Housing Data Standards right across the sector.

The panel recommends that housing associations agree to adopt these standards within six months of this review and produce a comprehensive strategy across the sector that implements the standards in full, within three years.

We would like to see this audit being undertaken on a regular basis with the information gathered forming a national and updatable, publicly available database of the social housing stock and wider performance of housing associations in England.

The problem and related findings

As it currently stands, the sector has no clear picture of the state of its stock and its wider performance. Data quality and integrity are, in fact a resource drain across the sector, with an estimated 25-30% of all resources currently engaged in recording, collating, cleaning and re-keying poor quality data.⁵ This makes for inadequate insight, compromises decision making and hampers scrutiny and accountability.

Many stakeholders we spoke with suggested that housing associations both need to be more proactive about getting on top of data on quality and to make more effective use of what is already known.

The focus of regulation over recent years has been significantly skewed towards measuring and valuing success against economic rather than consumer standards. Organisations can therefore be working to KPIs more related to business efficiency, such as

the number of new housing units being built, than to measuring tenant satisfaction with them. This has led to some housing associations shifting their focus from basic housing management to a continuous push for development and growth in the desire to reach and exceed these targets.

The number of external requirements and standards housing associations are required to deliver against can similarly result in organisations measuring functional components and formal data at the cost of other things which are harder to measure, but arguably more important, such as tenant experience.

Housing associations use a variety of approaches to collate information about compliance, even with something as fundamental as the Decent Homes Standard. Some, for example, exclude homes where plans are in place to repair from reporting which leads to discrepancies in data about the rates of compliance.

⁵ HACT, November 2022

The end result can be a reality gap - self-reported compliance is over 99%, while the English Housing Survey found compliance at 88.7%.⁶

Especially in larger housing associations, the leaders and, in particular the board, may not have sufficient line of sight on the realities of that tenant experience - the distance between those with the power to get things done and tenants can become too long. Staff may also be concerned about the possible consequences of being open in reporting on poor performance so reporting can become more about providing potentially misplaced reassurance rather than proper assurance.

Responses to this review however, raised a range of concerns about quality across the social housing sector which need to be more confidently understood and addressed.

In 2020, 11% of dwellings in the social rented sector failed to meet the Decent Homes Standard. This equates to around 448,000 homes.⁷ It is clear that poor quality social housing is an issue for too many tenants. According to the English Housing Survey, almost one third (32%) of social renters had considered making a complaint to their landlord or tenant management organisation and among those who did complain, almost two thirds (63%) were not happy with the response they received to their complaint. Furthermore, 43% of those choosing not to complain chose not to because of the hassle and time required to do so.⁸

The social injustice of this is further exacerbated by the fact that the social rented sector is home to a higher proportion of people from excluded or disadvantaged groups than other sectors. In social rented households 55% have at least one household member with a long-term illness or disability (this contrasts with 29% of private rented households), 50% are in the lowest income quintile and 18% are lone parent households.⁹ Social housing tenants are also disproportionately likely to be from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.¹⁰ Relative to total population size, 44% of Black African households and 40% of Black Caribbean households are social renters, compared to 16% of White British households. Black and minority ethnic tenants are also more often located in inner city properties where stock may be poorer quality and harder to repair and retrofit, and where there are fewer green areas.¹¹

Stakeholders told us that too many one or two bed units are being built to hit development targets and that there is consequently even more pressure on the availability of larger properties for intergenerational family groups. This can lead to overcrowding which can, in turn, have negative health impacts for tenants. Again, this inadequacy of stock unfairly and disproportionately impacts people from black and minority ethnic communities. A study by the Black South West Network, for example found that 63% of Somali households, who are more likely to live in inner-city social housing estates, experienced overcrowding.¹²

⁶ Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (July 2022), English Housing Survey: Social rented sector, 2020-21 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1088500/EHS20-21_Social_Rented_Sector_Report.pdf

⁷ As above

⁸ As above

⁹ As above

¹⁰ Renting social housing - GOV.UK Ethnicity facts and figures (www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk)

¹¹ Inside Housing (24th May 2021), How race impacts on people's chances of living in a damp home or experiencing fuel poverty <https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/insight/insight/how-race-impacts-on-peoples-chances-of-living-in-a-damp-home-or-experiencing-fuel-poverty-70645>

¹² Black South West Network for Power to Change & Bristol City Council (2020), Housing BAME communities in Bristol <https://www.blacksouthwestnetwork.org/>

We heard many concerns about the number of empty properties across the sector and the need to know with more confidence about how many there are and their current condition. This would help to optimise their use to relieve the critically serious shortages of social housing across the country. Some stakeholders questioned why so few housing associations have opted to raise voids standards generally, even though investment in this might also establish better relationships and more trust with tenants from the start of their tenancies.

Damp, mould and condensation were the most prevalent and long-standing concerns for the majority of stakeholders we spoke to as part of the review. The Housing Ombudsman found, however that the majority of social landlords still take a reactive, rather than a proactive approach to dealing with this issue.¹³ Numbers of complaints are going up and more are being upheld.

Equity issues are at play here too as people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds are much more likely to live in houses with damp and mould and to experience fuel poverty.¹⁴ The risk of tenants turning heating down or off because of the current cost of living pressures can trigger increased problems with damp and mould which have direct, adverse health consequences. Studies have linked damp to a number of health problems including respiratory issues, asthma, physical pain, immune system issues and headaches, particularly affecting children.¹⁵ A recent

study found that retrofitting home insulation can reduce the onset of chronic respiratory diseases, such as asthma, by up to 10% and can also help to manage symptoms.

Homes with heat pumps fitted had even better results on health.¹⁶ In fact, as part of The Warm Home Prescription trial doctors are now prescribing heating to those patients that have health conditions that get worse in the cold, to avoid the cost of hospital care if they become more ill.¹⁷

The recommendation

The Regulator for Social Housing clearly plays an extremely important role in relation to quality and performance across the sector. In this context the panel welcomes the increased powers of the regulator, the work of the new Director of Consumer Regulation and the development of new Tenant Satisfaction Measures, all of which are expected to be enacted through legislation stemming from the current Social Housing Regulation Bill. The panel urges the government now to complete this legislative process at pace.

The particular recommendation of the panel in this area is that housing associations should work together to conduct and publish a thorough audit of all social housing in England. It is recommended that this is made possible by sector-wide adoption of the HACT UK Housing Data Standards (UKHDS).

¹³ Housing Ombudsman Service (October 2021), Spotlight on: Damp and mould

<https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Spotlight-report-Damp-and-mould-final.pdf>

¹⁴ Inside Housing, How race impacts on people's chances of living in a damp home or experiencing fuel poverty <https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/insight/insight/how-race-impacts-on-peoples-chances-of-living-in-a-damp-home-or-experiencing-fuel-poverty-70645> citing English Housing Survey Data, <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/housing/housing-conditions/housing-with-damp-problems/latest#by-ethnicity> and Fuel Poverty Data, <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk>

¹⁵ Housing Ombudsman Service (October 2021), Spotlight on: Damp and mould

<https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Spotlight-report-Damp-and-mould-final.pdf> ; NHS, Can damp and mould affect my health? <https://www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/lifestyle/can-damp-and-mould-affect-my-health/>

¹⁶ Indoor Air (August 2022), Retrofitting home insulation reduces incidence and severity of chronic respiratory disease <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ina.13101>

¹⁷ BBC News (22 November 2022), Energy bills: patients prescribed heating as part of health trial <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-63707689>

The sector needs good quality data that is consistently recorded and expressed to drive insight about both housing quality and service experience. Adoption of the UKHDS would also, as one specific example, provide the means to drive insight around whether and how certain groups of tenants experience discrimination – an issue which has most recently been highlighted again as a central factor in Awaab Ishak’s death.

Good quality data enables boards to accurately assess the quality, safety and experience of what it provides. Comprehensive data standards would strengthen scrutiny and accountability, allow for informed comparisons across housing associations, give all tenants a quality benchmark and promote much easier sharing of good practice. With good data, landlords can make much better decisions.

Conducting a national audit based on these standards would establish the true state of social housing in England and could be used to inform policy and practice and create a powerful case for targeted support from, and engagement with, government on increasing the quality of social housing.

3. Housing associations should partner with tenants, contractors and frontline staff to develop and apply new standards defining what an outstanding maintenance and repairs process looks like.



There are widespread and growing concerns about how too many housing associations manage the maintenance and repair of their housing stock and respond to concerns and complaints about this raised by tenants.

Each housing association should ask tenants, frontline staff and contractors to work together to review how the organisation deals with maintenance and repairs. They should develop new standards together to be applied to review the organisation's performance and then develop an annual plan for continuous improvement.

The problem and related findings

It was very evident from our discussions with tenants in particular that dissatisfaction with repairs and maintenance work is a major issue in the sector. Investment in repairs of social housing stock is 33% below target and this is clearly having a knock on effect on the overall quality of stock as well as tenant satisfaction levels.¹⁸

Satisfaction with repairs is lower among social renters (66%) than private renters (75%) and the main reasons for dissatisfaction are: 'the landlord is slow to get things done' (29%), 'the landlord does not bother' (26%), 'the work done was of poor quality' (17%) and 'the landlord does the bare minimum' (13%).¹⁹

The Right to Buy policy contributed to a reduction in the number of homes available for social rent overall²⁰ and simultaneously led to an increase in the proportion of social housing stock that is difficult to maintain, particularly in inner-city areas.²¹

The cost of repairs and maintenance works has increased well beyond inflation levels. Future developments must consider the scarcity of materials and energy as this approach will enable future cost savings. Retrofitting existing housing stock and improving insulation may seem expensive but investment now would enable savings in the future. The current very high cost implications of retrofitting are compounded by the fact that VAT on retrofitting to meet zero carbon responsibilities is currently 20% whilst there is no VAT on new builds. Yet it is often the older properties that are most popular with social housing tenants. The panel asks government to review this VAT anomaly as a priority.

¹⁸ Inside Housing (6th September 2022), RSH quarterly survey: inflation and labour shortages bring repairs investment 33% below target

¹⁹ Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, English Housing Survey, Social Rented Sector 2020-21 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1088500/EHS20-21_Social_Rented_Sector_Report.pdf

²⁰ DLUHC Regulation of Social Housing report of first session 2022/23,

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5803/cmselect/cmcomloc/18/report.html>

²¹ As above

There are additional issues with supply chains with smaller housing associations often disadvantaged in such a competitive market²² and labour shortages have also been a problem, particularly as a result of the pandemic. It was clear from discussions with stakeholders that in-house repairs and maintenance services appear, on balance, to deliver better end to end service and more reliable quality, but that is not a practical possibility for all associations.

Issues with standards can be harder to navigate for tenants with disabilities. The Social Landlord Disability Charter has been drafted by the Social Housing Action Campaign to encourage and help housing associations achieve greater awareness of, and compliance with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. Social landlords may be familiar with making reasonable adjustments to properties, such as ramps or alternative communication methods, but adjustments required by tenants with mental health issues or invisible impairments can be more challenging for housing associations to address.²³

Many stakeholders we spoke with raised the issue of ‘ambulance chaser’ lawyers diverting finance which might otherwise be allocated to investment in repairs and maintenance and working more proactively on concerns. Most of the lawyers we spoke with, however pointed out that very few lawyers working on a ‘no win no fee’ basis would take on a case unless they thought the grounds were strong enough to make a win the more likely outcome. Government must in this context carry responsibility for the very steep cuts in the availability of legal aid funding in recent years. This has meant that, even when the (Homes) Fitness for Human Habitation Act was brought in 2018, so few legal aid lawyers were by then available to take up the opportunities this created to pursue wider disrepair

claims that this legislation has yet to be taken through the courts and used.

Dissatisfaction with the process of managing maintenance and repairs is significantly compounded by equivalent concerns with the handling of complaints and the defensive culture of too many housing associations.

Studies have shown that barriers relating to disability, sexuality, ethnicity, not having English as a first language, communication impairments, poor mental health, homelessness and geographical isolation can all contribute to people not being properly heard when they raise concerns. The panel noted from interviews with stakeholders that class is often an issue too.

The primary responsibility for resolving complaints lies with providers, but complainants can be expected to assimilate into systems that do not meet their needs and processes can be obstructive and inefficient. There are bureaucratic barriers to complaining including confusing terminology, (such as the difference between appeals and complaints,) and the complexity of the complaints processes themselves.²⁴

Levels of distress among tenants raising complaints can understandably be high, but staff handling the complaints can develop fatigue from dealing with them.²⁵ Staff in central call centres can too easily make unfounded assumptions about where problems and fault lie, tending to push back on what tenants tell them rather than accepting and acting on that. Too many providers have a culture of viewing complaints as unwelcome criticism in need of a defensive response rather than as valuable learning opportunities that provide critical insight.²⁶

²² Inside Housing (26th June 2022), New homes, repair and maintenance costs all rising above inflation, warns NHF

<https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/news/news/new-homes-repair-and-maintenance-costs-all-rising-above-inflation-warns-nhf-77899>

²³ Inside Housing (17th October 2022), Disabled tenants speak out through new charter

<https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/insight/insight/disabled-tenants-speak-out-through-new-charter-77901>

²⁴ University of Glasgow (August 2022), Briefing paper: Barriers to accessing adult social care and social housing complaint systems

<https://eprints.gla.ac.uk/277463/1/277463.pdf>

²⁵ Housing Ombudsman Service (October 2021), Spotlight on: Damp and mould

<https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Spotlight-report-Damp-and-mould-final.pdf>

²⁶ As above

Complaints to The Housing Ombudsman have increased by 139%²⁷ but there are still many tenants who choose not to complain for fear of retribution.²⁸ Social tenants from black and minority ethnic backgrounds are reported to feel afraid to discuss housing conditions for fear of losing their homes or other repercussions.²⁹ The Housing Ombudsman has repeatedly raised serious concerns about poor record keeping which further undermines the process of managing complaints.

The recommendation

The panel strongly supports the Housing Ombudsman's 2020 Complaint Handling Code which sets out good practice that will allow landlords to respond to complaints effectively and fairly. Strengthened provisions were recently added to this which took effect from April this year.

This area also speaks to the importance of data. One of the early domains that was developed for the UKHDS was on reactive repairs and planned maintenance, closely followed by development handover data. Good data and data flows are critical if the sector is to develop repairs and maintenance services that build excellence. If housing associations know about their buildings, can share data effectively across the supply chain and then have one accurate, data driven record of a building and its performance, both preventative and reactive maintenance should improve.

Retrofitting implementation and net zero improvements should also be factored into these data records. The panel believes that for the sector to truly accelerate towards a lower carbon future the current 20% VAT on retrofitting (vs. 0% on new builds) needs urgently addressing to ensure that it becomes as economically viable for a housing provider to bring an existing home up to standard, as it is to build from scratch.

Getting new building right from the start will also be important. There needs to be a long-term vision for the development of new housing stock which is sustainable and responds to net zero targets. Passivhaus schemes such as Goldsmith Street social housing in Norwich show what is possible to achieve if there is a will. The better the build quality, the less the effort which will be required to maintain it and the more sustainable the homes can be. The planned update to the Decent Homes Standard is timely in the context of new pressures on energy costs and the seriousness of the cost of living crisis. Careful choice of building materials along with ventilation, (extractor fans in kitchens and bathrooms or, even better, whole house ventilation systems,) with better heating and insulation will, as examples, help to eradicate damp and mould – the biggest source of complaint from tenants.

The specific recommendation of the panel in this area, however is that housing associations should use the experience and knowledge of those closest to the reality of the landlord's handling of maintenance and repairs – the tenants, contractors and frontline staff – and partner with them to develop and apply new standards defining what an excellent maintenance and repairs process looks like.

These should then be used to benchmark current performance – taking Decent Homes as the minimum acceptable standard – and inform the development of an annual plan for continuous improvement. Results should be shared across the sector to support wider learning.

²⁷ Housing Executive (January 2022), Social Housing Professionalisation review underway www.housingexecutive.co.uk

²⁸ University of Glasgow (August 2022), Briefing paper: Barriers to accessing adult social care and social housing complaint systems <https://eprints.gla.ac.uk/277463/1/277463.pdf>

²⁹ Inside Housing (24th May 2021), How race impacts on people's chances of living in a damp home or experiencing fuel poverty, citing research by Black South West Network, <https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/insight/how-race-impacts-on-peoples-chances-of-living-in-a-damp-home-or-experiencing-fuel-poverty-70645>

4. The Chartered Institute of Housing should promote the traditional housing officer³⁰ role as a supported and valued employment opportunity with a Chartered Institute of Housing recognised programme of training and continuing development.



Exceptional pressures and demands on frontline staff working directly with tenants are contributing to very high turnover rates at this level and making it much harder for many tenants to communicate with their landlord.

Housing associations should increase investment in recruiting, developing and supporting the retention of more housing officers to enable them to re-establish more manageable patch sizes.

The problem and related findings

Frontline employees such as housing officers can be a housing provider's biggest asset when it comes to realising the sector's core purpose, regularly walking around local communities, building trust and knowledge of household circumstances through face to face connections and relationships with tenants and building on the ground knowledge of the housing stock.

Over recent years, however the number of housing officers employed has decreased as investment in digital communications has increased and we heard about patch sizes which have expanded to up to 1000 households with an increased range of complexities thrown into the mix, including anti-social as well as criminal behaviour.

The panel noted a significant level of stress being experienced by these customer-facing employees. They are often all too acutely aware of the shortfalls in the quality of services, but are unable to access the

resources they would need to deliver to the standard they would want to. They do not feel empowered to make the decisions and take the actions that would be necessary to solve tenants' problems.

Stakeholders report that frontline employees like housing officers are currently feeling under siege from above and below as well as from social and traditional media. There is a lack of general public recognition of and status for this important role and morale can be low. This can in turn lead to a deficit of aspiration, ambition and pride for officers in their role. Research shows that being complained about can have a negative impact on those delivering public services which then feeds into feelings of less trust for the service users themselves.³¹

³⁰The role that has traditionally been referred to as 'housing officer' is defined here as those staff who interact with tenants on a daily basis and liaise with them in regards to their properties.

³¹University of Glasgow (August 2022), Briefing paper: Barriers to accessing adult social care and social housing complaint systems <https://eprints.gla.ac.uk/277463/1/277463.pdf>

It is clear that, within the sector, there are purpose-driven, approachable and empathetic individuals working in housing officer type roles. However, unless they are properly valued and rewarded, turnover will continue to be high and this can have a direct, adverse effect on the quality of service that tenants experience. Time and again, stakeholders taking part in the review, reported significant problems with the recruitment and retention of staff overall due to a competitive and volatile market, but this is particularly true of the frontline. High staff turnover is contributing to what one stakeholder described as ‘the snakes and ladders effect’ whereby, as soon as a tenant makes progress on an enquiry or complaint, a new member of staff comes in to replace that departing staff member and tenants repeatedly have to start the process all over again.

In this context it was also noted that there is a recurring risk of housing providers having to employ people at pace out of necessity to cover urgent staffing gaps rather than taking the time needed to make the best appointment and insisting on the quality, skills, experience and more representative diversity really needed to fill critical roles.

The recommendation

The panel believes that improving the recruitment and retention of housing officers and increasing the numbers employed in this role across the sector again would make a very positive difference to the sector’s ability to deliver high quality social housing services, not least through allowing reductions in patch sizes again.

One way to raise morale would be to encourage links between different customer facing teams so that they begin to have the agency, capability and capacity to proactively identify issues together and take effective action.

All housing associations should also take a ‘values-based’ approach to the recruitment and development of staff generally with clearly defined expectations around attitudes and behaviours and linked rewards and incentives that encourage outstanding customer service. When recruiting new housing officers in particular, organisations should seek to attract candidates from the communities they are based in, both to widen representation and to build stronger connections between the staff and the tenants they support.

The specific recommendation of the panel in this area, however is that the Chartered Institute of Housing should promote the traditional housing officer role³² as a valued and supported employment opportunity with a recognised programme of training and continuing development which would then open up opportunities for career progression across the sector. This programme should cover a range of formal professional skills, but also support the development of strengths such as empathy, decision making and communication, as well as building knowledge and understanding of relevant issues such as mental health, anti-social behaviour and domestic violence.

The panel strongly believes that this approach would help to raise the profile of this work and increase the status and national recognition that these crucial roles deserve.

³²The role that has traditionally been referred to as ‘housing officer’ is defined here as those staff who interact with tenants on a daily basis and liaise with them in regards to their properties.

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.



There are widespread concerns that tenant voice, and the diversity of that voice, can get lost in a sector under pressure where leaders can be distanced from the realities of tenant experience.

Tenants should be recognised as key partners in delivering sector purpose. All housing associations should assess their performance against tenants' experiences by empowering them to lead investigations and reviews and expand the roles they can play across organisations.

The problem and related findings

Many housing associations have made focused efforts over recent years to try to engage tenants and listen to their experience and ideas. The National Housing Federation is investing in the Together with Tenants initiative and the panel recognises the value and intention of this.

Tenants now often sit on housing association boards and fulfil important scrutiny and governance roles. The importance of boards and senior leaders in setting and modelling an organisation's culture and values cannot be underestimated. Leaders should, as one review respondent said, 'have enough insight to develop empathy' with tenant experience.

Having tenants on the board is one positive way to shorten that line of sight. This has even greater significance in the context of the challenges that the sector faces in relation to representation at senior staffing levels. An Inside Housing survey on diversity found 62 housing associations had all-white executive teams and more than a quarter of associations had all-white boards. Furthermore, men made up 58%

of all executive-level jobs in the UK and 66% of G15 executives. While 18% of social housing tenants in England are disabled, only 4.9% of board members and 5% of executives identified as disabled. Research carried out in both the Midlands and Kent by The Housing Diversity Network found that housing providers reflect their community at front line level, but the further up the organisation you go the less diverse it gets.³⁴

Black and minority ethnic tenants are currently often excluded from decision-making. Consequently, issues that impact such groups disproportionately, such as overcrowding, unsafe and poor quality housing, overconcentration of housing in the most deprived areas and language barriers may not be given proper emphasis. These communities can too often be disregarded with decisions which affect them being repeatedly made without seeking their input, with the excuse that they are 'hard to reach'.

³³ Inside Housing (Dec 2021), How diverse is the housing association workforce in England?

<https://www.housing.org.uk/globalassets/files/edi/new-edi-national-data-report-final.pdf>

³⁴ Housing Diversity Network (November 2022), Kent Housing Group – EDI Baseline Report 2022 <https://www.housingdiversitynetwork.co.uk>

<https://www.housingdiversitynetwork.co.uk>

Tenant engagement, both at board level and more widely, has also tended to favour people with the available time to commit – another reason why those who are most engaged are not always representative of the demographic of the local tenant group.

At present there is no standard definition of ‘engagement’ when it comes to social housing tenants and the objective behind the engagement itself may not be clearly expressed or understood. Tenants’ contributions and ideas may not always be carried forward and, as a result, the experience of engagement can too easily feel like a ‘tick-box exercise’.

The recommendation

The panel recommends that all housing associations should see their tenants as one of their most important assets alongside their staff and the physical housing stock. The representation and contribution of tenants should sit automatically at the very heart of an organisation and be established as the ‘golden thread’ running through all operations.

Housing associations are encouraged to think more widely and creatively about a range of forms of engagement in order to ensure diverse and representative tenant voices are far more prominent throughout organisations. They should, for example, actively ensure that, when seeking to give tenants a voice and influence, there is proportionate representation from black and ethnic tenants.

The panel particularly recommends that housing associations work in partnership with tenants at all levels of the organisation, assessing their performance against tenants’ experiences and empowering tenants to lead investigations and reviews as standard.

In addition, the panel recommends that housing providers go further and actively recruit and employ tenants through:

1. Creating or providing more tenant apprenticeships schemes as well as a wider range of tenant volunteering roles to provide more pathways to employment for tenants, and opening up opportunities for valued contribution and inclusion to a much wider diversity of tenants.
2. Recruiting and supporting tenant peer mentors in paid roles to represent and support other tenants through complaints processes.
3. Recruiting and supporting tenants in paid roles to sit on newly created peer complaint resolution / adjudication boards.

All this should have a direct effect on how tenants feel treated and valued and potentially release significant additional strengths and capacity to support effective delivery of the organisation’s purpose.

6. Housing associations should develop a proactive local community presence through community hubs which foster greater multi-agency working



Too many tenants are concerned about reduced face to face contact with landlords. Internal silo working and lack of commitment to external multi-agency working can reduce the efficiency and impact of associations.

Housing associations should actively seek to create more community-based hubs, either by engaging with existing ones or actively setting up new ones. These hubs should reflect the needs and aspirations of the community and be based on the principle of 'go where the tenants are'.

The problem and related findings

The panel were told several times about the number of community buildings housing associations own across the country, but one of the most strongly and frequently shared complaints we heard from tenants was about the loss of local, face to face contacts with housing association staff. Part of this related to reductions in the numbers of housing officers employed, but tenants of larger associations in particular also raised real concern about the lack of organisational community presence and how much harder it therefore felt to connect with their landlord. Instead of being able to call in to a local office for support or advice, tenants generally have to contact staff by phone or digitally. The staff at the end of the phone are much less likely to know about and understand local issues and many tenants find it harder to raise concerns through these routes for reasons ranging from lack of self-esteem to mental health problems or cultural and language barriers.

Many tenants shared their experience of a number of housing associations working across one estate without apparently making any attempt to cooperate and coordinate knowledge and resources. We also

heard about how isolated smaller and specialist housing associations can be from other sector providers. Black and minority ethnic housing associations, for example, told us how their numbers have been reducing as they are too quickly absorbed into large generic associations if they run into difficulty rather than being offered more creative support by those associations.

Tenants may be engaged with a number of public and voluntary sector bodies as well as their landlord and juggling all those relationships can be challenging and frustrating in terms of both time and travel costs.

Compared with other tenures, social renters are generally less satisfied with their local area and the supporting infrastructure (79% compared with 91% of owners and 86% of private renters).³⁵ A 'social infrastructure deficit' is defined as a place suffering from poor connectivity (physical and digital), low community engagement levels and lacking in meeting spaces.³⁶

³⁵ Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, English Housing Survey: Social rented sector, 2020-21 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1088500/EHS20-21_Social_Rented_Sector_Report.pdf

³⁶ APPG Left Behind Neighbourhoods, Social capital and social infrastructure: why it matters

<https://www.appg-leftbehindneighbourhoods.org.uk/evidence/session-2-social-capital-and-social-infrastructure-why-it-matters/>

The stakeholders we spoke with however – both tenants and staff – showed a keen interest in reviving communal spaces to meet. This was partly a response to how many people are struggling with loneliness and isolation, but was also recognition of all the potential benefits of being part of a joined up community where interests and skills can be shared and positive relationships can be built.

The recommendation

Housing providers of the future need to be designing social housing with strong social infrastructure that in turn, helps to build cohesive communities. The panel has been inspired by providers such as the members of the PlaceShapers network who work together to help communities to thrive. We also discussed the work of Big Local supported by Local Trust and reviewed the work of a number of other innovative community-based initiatives.

Our recommendation is that housing associations should actively seek to create more community-based hubs, either by engaging with existing ones or actively setting up new ones. Housing providers have a real opportunity to think creatively here. The hubs might provide an opportunity to repurpose an existing building or facility owned by an association or be included in a new, multi-purpose development. Equally, associations could contribute to the income and sustainability of a provision in another organisation's premises.

Association staff should be available in the hub at known times across a week, ideally alongside a cross-section of other agencies. This would build connectivity between housing workers and tenants and between staff across the different agencies. It would also improve access for tenants to the services of all the agencies involved. In the same way, smaller, specialist

housing associations might become more visible and secure as part of bigger, collaborative networks, enabling them to share their knowledge more widely and extend their influence on practice.

Hubs could tap into and make connections with other local services such as after school clubs, libraries, crèches, shared working spaces, training and skills programmes, furniture exchanges, repairs workshops, community gardens, and many other ideas that benefit their community.

What is important is that they should be community-led, reflect the needs and aspirations of their community and be firmly based on the principle of 'go where the tenants are'.

This approach does not necessarily require substantial financial investment, but the positive impacts on health, well being, opportunity, life satisfaction and increased social cohesion represent substantial social value – a value which must be captured by housing associations in any assessment of return on investments.

The panel recognises that the concept of a specific community hub may not be appropriate for all housing associations. Rural associations will, for example, tend to have smaller pockets of housing scattered across a number of communities. The principles of proactively working to increase the range of connections between tenants and their landlord and investing in multi-agency working, however should apply across the sector.

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.



For these recommendations to have real impact, housing associations should work with their tenants and frontline staff to examine how well they are doing in terms of implementing them and together find ways to overcome the challenges and barriers they face in doing so. Every housing association is different, but it is the frontline staff and tenants who have the most direct experience and insights to help ensure that the ambitions in these recommendations become a reality on the ground.



CONCLUSION

The English Housing Survey indicates that most social housing in England is of a decent standard and we have seen inspiring examples of positive and effective practice across the sector in the course of the panel's review.

The deaths of 72 individuals in the devastating fire at Grenfell and now the death of Awaab Ishak whilst living in a social housing property, however have thrown into sharp relief serious, continuing questions about the quality of social housing which both the sector and government must urgently acknowledge and address.

We urge the social housing sector to take immediate action on the issues raised in this review and would like to see our recommendations built into sector-wide as well as organisation-specific plans within six months.

The power imbalance between tenants and housing providers remains one of the biggest problems facing the sector, perpetuating rather than dismantling the societal stigma and discrimination experienced by people living in social housing. This is particularly true for those from black and minority ethnic communities.

To tackle this, social housing tenants must be front and centre of the sector's thinking. All tenants should be recognised and included as valued partners in the delivery of the sector's purpose as the key to unlocking an equitable and socially just way forward.

Associations need to go back to basics alongside tenants and staff at all levels, reviewing what to prioritise to deliver core purpose, reassessing wider ambitions against capacity and reviewing the systems and beliefs at the very heart of their operations. A framework of national standards with reliable

evidence of performance against them should underpin all this work and will be crucial to ensuring the quality of both homes and services.

The government, for its part, must fully accept its responsibilities and its accountability for the provision of decent safe and secure housing for all its citizens, as it has always done for health and education. It must also recognise where it has failed to provide the environment and investments needed to support the vital work of the sector.

With its 'house in order' the sector will be in a far stronger position to create a powerful collective case for targeted support from, and active engagement with government. The government and the sector should seize the opportunity to work together on delivering a shared vision for high quality social housing and its power to transform lives.

This country must be more ambitious for social housing, for the tenants who live in it, the employees who work in it, and the communities it forms such an important part of. After all, this doesn't just have the potential to ensure that every housing association provides homes where its tenants can thrive. It also has the potential to positively and profoundly benefit the health and wellbeing of communities up and down the country. That is a sector with real purpose. True ambition. That is a world class vision of 'levelling up'.

Methodology note

In June 2022, the Better Social Housing Review (BSHR) was set up by the National Housing Federation (NHF) and Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH), to independently examine ways to improve the quality of social housing provision in England.

As sector representatives, the two organisations asked an independent panel of experts to conduct a full review into the social housing provision provided by housing associations in England. The review was to culminate in a series of practical recommendations by the end of the year.

The aim of the review was to examine existing issues – physical, cultural and environmental – and make recommendations to help ensure that, going forwards, all social housing is fit for tenants to live and thrive in.

The panel was asked to consider the funding and policy environment in which the sector operates; common factors that may exist in cases of poor quality; issues around accessing repairs services; effectiveness of complaints procedures; as well as improved approaches for housing associations, tenants and Government to work individually and collectively to resolve issues.

In August, after compiling a target list of key stakeholders to approach for interviews, the panel began a period of consultation which consisted of both face-to-face and virtual meetings with a range of organisations and individuals who have a stake in improving the quality of social housing, including:

- Tenants' groups and campaigners
- The housing association sector
- Frontline workers – including repairs and maintenance staff as well as customer-facing staff
- The Regulator of Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman Service
- Professionals working in housing including lawyers and architects

- The charity sector
- The Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities
- MPs with an interest in social housing.

With the aim of conducting an open, inclusive and representative review the panel launched a website (www.bettersocialhousingreview.org.uk) in September which hosted two online surveys – one specifically for tenants, and the second for other social housing stakeholders. These surveys remained open for submissions until 31st October 2022.

During October, the panel held meetings around the country, visiting housing associations in London, Loughborough, Bath, Manchester and Sunderland in order to meet face-to-face with tenants and frontline workers.

Members of the panel met fortnightly either virtually or face-to-face throughout the review period and, following four months of insights and evidence gathering, drafted their recommendations in November when they also finalised this report.

The panel reported their findings to The Better Social Housing Review's Steering Group. This group is made up of housing association leaders who helped to shape the original terms of reference for the review and will now take the recommendations forward within the sector.

Neither the two funding organisations nor the Steering Group had any direct role in running the review, nor in the panel's final recommendations.

The Steering Group will now work to develop an action plan in response to the panel's recommendations for the sector to implement as soon as possible. The NHF and CIH will consult their members as part of this.

Throughout the process, the panel was supported by a secretariat to manage logistics for the panel including organising meetings and interviews, attending meetings of the panel as required in order to take minutes and drafting initial report content and recommendations at the instruction of the panel. The secretariat was provided by Forster Communications.

The Better Social Housing Review has been funded by The National Housing Federation and Chartered Institute of Housing.

About the Panel

The National Housing Federation and Chartered Institute of Housing appointed Helen Baker as Chair of the Better Social Housing Review panel after research by an external consultancy. The additional members of the panel were convened by invitation from the Chair, with support from Forster Communications.

A long list of potential panel members was drawn up and supplied to the Chair for her consideration and invitation. The Chair was asked to consider:

- People who live, or have lived, in social housing
- Background and experience in social housing, business, academia and the charity sector
- Geographic spread
- Diversity and inclusion
- Ensuring a lack of political bias.

As a result, the independent panel is made up of five volunteer experts with diverse experience of social housing in England and a passion for improving its quality.

They are:

Helen Baker, Chair

Helen has held many board level leadership roles in the civil society and public sectors across a career spanning social care, housing, health and education. She has chaired organisations ranging from national housing associations to NHS trusts and social care providers, a multi-academy trust and both local and national charities.

Helen has set up and managed a number of charities and began her career as a social worker. She has always had a strong focus on working with those who have been marginalised and disadvantaged – in particular those with disabilities, mental health issues or other long-term health conditions. Board appointments with Government arms-length bodies have included roles with the General Social Care Council, the Commission for the Compact and the National College for School Leadership.

Helen is currently the chair of Shelter and vice chair of The What Works Centre for Wellbeing and is also a deputy lieutenant for Oxfordshire.

Jennifer Brathwaite

Jennifer has been a councillor for Lambeth Council for 12 years and is a landlord and tenant lawyer by profession, specialising in leasehold enfranchisement. She was deputy leader of Lambeth Council, having held cabinet portfolios in Housing, Environment and Children Services. She has direct experience of the issues faced by those who live in social housing and those who are struggling to be housed.

Jennifer led on Lambeth's Equalities Commission and has a strong commitment to equality and diversity. As well as having run her own law firm she has been a partner for a medium sized London firm of solicitors. She has a particular interest in helping tenants and landlords to understand their rights and obligations. Leading Lambeth's housing services, she has direct knowledge of the inner workings of a large housing provider and has seen, first-hand, how good and poor quality housing services impact people's lives.

She is keen to raise awareness of the plethora of (often complex) housing/ leasehold legislation, as good legislation does not automatically enforce itself.

Sumita Singha OBE

Sumita is a chartered architect, author and teacher with a passion for the environment, equity and ethics. She came to the UK 30 years ago from India, on a scholarship to the University of Cambridge to study sustainable design, having studied architecture in India. She runs her own sustainability-focused practice, Ecologic Architects, and is on the board of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). Sumita has been teaching architecture for 30 years; and is a published author and popular speaker.

Sumita was on an NHS board for nine years and is passionate about health equity through design. She campaigns on social equity and diversity, setting up Architects for Change, the Equality Forum for architects in 2000, and is a trustee of the Architects Benevolent Society amongst others. Sumita comes from a humble background and has direct experience of the issues faced by people living in social housing and helping many. She is interested in the provision of safe, durable and sustainable housing for all. Sumita received an OBE for services to architecture in 2021.

Declaration of interests: Director, Ecologic Architects; Part time visiting lecturer, University of Westminster; Visiting professor, Technical University of Milano; Trustee, Charushila; Trustee, Commonwealth Association of Architects; Trustee, Waltham Abbey Royal Gunpowder Mills; Professional Conduct Panel, RIBA; Member, Hackney Design Review Panel; Trustee, Royal Institute of British Architects.

Neal Wylde

Neal has lived in rented accommodation for over 30 years, in both private and social housing. He has sat on a number of social housing panels and volunteered as an engaged tenant for 11 years. Neal has been involved in all aspects of engagement, from analysing and improving the operational workings of organisations and contract procurement, to communications systems, policy oversight and staff employment.

Neal has been volunteering with the National Housing Federation (NHF) Tenant Advisory Panel since 2019 on the Together with Tenants Charter, was involved in

the Together with Tenants roll out, and continues to volunteer with the NHF to challenge and support what they are doing to strengthen relationships between tenants and landlords. He has worked in managerial positions in a range of industries including retail, wholesale, the motor industry and transport logistics. As a wheelchair user, Neal is passionate about ensuring the voices and experiences of tenants with disabilities and the more vulnerable within society are heard and respected.

Declaration of interests: NHF tenant advisory panel member; Housing Ombudsman resident panel member; Social Housing Quality resident panel member.

Tom Markham

Tom is a Commissioning Officer working in Children's Services for Manchester City Council. He has spent the last three years commissioning and leading on the procurement of accommodation and support services for care experienced children and young people, including Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children. This year, he was awarded the Council's 'Rising Star' award in recognition of his commissioning work, which focused on expanding partnerships with charitable/non-profit organisations.

Tom also works closely with the Leaving Care Service in Manchester, which supports over 100 care experienced young people leave care each year. Moreover, he has helped to roll out Manchester's House Project, which has developed into the Greater Manchester House Project Collaborative across seven Greater Manchester authorities, and which aims to better support care experienced young people moving into their first tenancy. Tom works closely with young people, their key workers, and providers to ensure Manchester develops the right accommodation at the right time to meet the presenting needs. In Tom's current role for Manchester City Council, he commissions and procures a variety of accommodation models delivered through a range of providers, including Housing Associations.

Tom is also a Youth Justice volunteer with Trafford Borough Council.

Stakeholders

Thank you to the following organisations and individuals who met with the panel and contributed to this review.

Architects specialising in social housing and building safety

Association of Retained Council Housing (ARCH)

Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) networks

- Assets and Repairs Group
- Frontline staff

CEL Solicitors

Crisis

Dan Hewitt, ITV

David Bogle, Hightown Housing Association

Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

Duncan Baker Brown, BakerBrown

Echelon Consultancy

English Rural Housing Association

Greater London Authority

Housing Associations' Charitable Trust (HACT)

HACT NED Network

Health Foundation

House Project

Housing Diversity Network

Housing Law Practitioners Association

Housing Ombudsman Service

Jim Strang, board member of Shelter

Kwajo Tweneboa

Local Government Association

Local Trust

Lord Roy Kennedy

National Federation of ALMOs

Placeshapers

Samantha Burrell

Shelter

Social Housing Action Campaign

Specialist lawyers

The Regulator of Social Housing

Tony Stacey, South Yorkshire Housing Association

Tpas

Trussell Trust

The National Housing Federation's networks:

- BME National
- BME London
- G15
- G320
- Supported housing

Site visits

Carrowbreck Meadow

Curo

EMH Homes

Gentoo Group

Goldsmith Street

MSV Housing Group

Peabody and Thamesmead Peabody

Conferences

National Housing Federation Summit

Labour Party Conference

Conservative Party Conference

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