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Title of meeting: Cabinet Member for Housing & Tackling Homelessness

Subject: Update on our Home Ownership Policies.

Cabinet Member: Councillor Darren Sanders, Cabinet Member for Housing and Tackling Homelessness

Date of meeting: 18 September 2024

Report by: James Hill, Director for Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services

Author: Mark Fitch, Head of Local Authority Housing

Wards affected: All

1. Requested by Cllr Darren Sanders, Cabinet Member for Housing and Tackling Homelessness

2. Purpose

- 2.1** To update on the Home Ownership Policies following the recent stock transfer from Clarion Homes.
- 2.2** To ensure that we meet all aspects of the new Consumer Standards introduced in April 2024, with respect to Home Ownership products.
- 2.3** To note the following policies have been recently revised or written - the Right to Buy (RTB) policy and the Shared Ownership (SO) policy.

3. The Social Housing White Paper and Charter for Social Housing Residents

- 3.1** The Government published its Social Housing White Paper in 2020 introducing a new Charter for Social Housing Residents. The Charter sets out Government's plans for new regulation, an enhanced Housing Ombudsman to improve complaints handling and new tenant satisfaction measures for social housing landlords to report against. All social housing landlords are expected to deliver on the below seven commitments, which residents should be able to expect from their landlord:

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3.1.1 To be safe in your home.

3.1.2 To know how your landlord is performing, including on repairs, complaints and safety, and how it spends its money.

3.1.3 To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly, with access to a strong Ombudsman.

3.1.4 To be treated with respect, backed by a strong consumer regulator and improved consumer standards for tenants.

3.1.5 To have your voice heard by your landlord.

3.1.6 To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in, with your landlord keeping your home in good repair.

3.1.7 The government will ensure social housing can support people to take their first step to ownership.

3.2 The Social Housing (Regulation) Bill became law on the 20 July 2023 providing the legal basis for many of the measures set out in the Charter for Social Housing Residents. The key changes the Act will bring include:

- **Intervention** – the Regulator of Social Housing can set up a proactive regulatory approach to the consumer standards.
- **Health and safety** – social housing landlords must designate a person to act as lead on compliance with health and safety obligations and publish their contact details.
- **Regulatory standards** – the Regulator can set new regulatory standards and issue a code of practice on them.
- **Tenant satisfaction measures** – the Regulator can require social housing landlords to collect tenant satisfaction measures.
- **Surveys** – the Regulator has the power to enter properties with only 48 hours' notice and make emergency repairs where there is a serious risk to tenants.
- **Emergency remedial action** – the Regulator can authorise persons to enter premises to take emergency remedial action to remedy failures by a landlord.
- **'Awaab's Law'** – the Regulator will set strict time limits for landlords to address hazards such as damp and mould.
- **Performance improvement plans** – the Regulator can give notice to require a landlord to prepare and implement a performance improvements plan where the landlord is failing to meet the regulatory standards.
- **Inspections** – the Regulator will carry out regular inspections of the largest social housing landlords and has the power to issue unlimited fines to failing landlords.
- **Professionalism** – the Regulator can set new qualification requirements for social housing managers.

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4 Consumer Standards

4.1 Social housing landlords must meet 'consumer standards' set by the Regulator of Social Housing which cover things like making sure tenants get quality accommodation, have choice and protection, and can hold their landlords to account.

4.2 On the 25 July 2023, the Regulator published a consultation on a new set of proposed consumer standards and a code of practice on those standards. They came into force from April 2024 replacing the existing consumer standards, and now focus very much on outcomes. The consumer standards are:

- **Safety and Quality Standard** – requires social housing landlords to provide safe and good quality homes and landlord services to tenants.
- **Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard** – requires social housing landlords to be open with tenants and treat them with fairness and respect so that tenants can access services, raise complaints when necessary, influence decision making and hold their landlord to account.
- **Neighbourhood and Community Standard** – requires social housing landlords to engage with other relevant parties so that tenants can live in safe and well-maintained neighbourhoods and feel safe in their homes.
- **Tenancy Standard** – sets requirements for the fair allocation and letting homes and for how those tenancies are managed and ended by social housing landlords.

5 Consumer Standards response

5.1 The Director of Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services is nominated as the 'responsible person' who is the point of contact for the Housing Regulator and ensures compliance with the housing regulatory standards.

5.2 The recruitment to a new housing policy officer role supports services in writing and reviewing policies in line with an ever-changing operating environment. Working within the local authority many of our existing policies have been created in partnership with wider local authority services, however, there is a requirement for us to create more specific policies that are more explicit in our approach as a landlord and to set out future plans for our housing residents.

5.3 We also need to ensure that our landlord policies are not merely technical documents but that they act as a guide to our residents in understanding what they can expect from us in terms of our services and the decisions that we make.

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- 5.4 The policy officer has a plan to review all current policies and procedures to ensure that they are up to date, consulted on with residents, and published so that they are accessible to our residents, enabling greater transparency and accountability.
- 5.5 Revised policies are in the appendix of this report for noting, including the Right to Buy (RTB) Policy (appendix A) and the new Shared Ownership Policy (appendix B).

6 Conclusion

- 6.1 The legislative and regulatory changes which have been introduced are significant and wide-reaching prompting the need to review and refresh our policies.
- 6.2 The stock transfer and management of Shared Ownership stock also means that we needed to create the Shared Ownership Policy, to ensure that we manage and allocate to these consistently and fairly, in line with legislation, the Capital Funding guide and best practice.

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Signed by James Hill, Director of Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services

Appendices:

- Appendix A – Right to Buy Policy 2024
Appendix B – Shared Ownership Policy 2024
Appendix C – IIA for Right to Buy Policy 2024
Appendix D – IIA for Shared Ownership Policy 2024

Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

| Title of document | Location |
|---|---|
| Charter for Social Housing 2020 | https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-charter-for-social-housing-residents-social-housing-white-paper |
| Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 | Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 (legislation.gov.uk) |
| Regulator of Housing Regulatory Standards | https://www.gov.uk/guidance/regulatory-standards |
| The Capital Funding Guide | Capital Funding Guide - 1. Shared Ownership - Guidance - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) |



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