

SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Comment on the Communities and Local Government Select Committee Inquiry into the Future of Housing Associations by Highbury Group on Housing Delivery

The Highbury Group is an independent group of specialists from public, private and independent sectors with a membership drawn from housing, planning and related professions; it offers advice and makes representations to Government and other agencies on planning and housing, with the aim of maintaining and increasing the output of housing, including high quality affordable housing (see footnote for membership).

The key purpose of the group is to promote policies and delivery mechanisms, which:

- * increase the overall supply of housing in line with need;
- * ensure that the supply of both existing and new housing in all tenures is of good quality and affordable by households on middle and lower incomes;
- * support the most effective use of both existing stock and new supply;
- * ensure that housing is properly supported by accessible infrastructure, facilities and employment opportunities.

The group welcomes the Select Committee inquiry and at its last meeting discussed the points on which the inquiry is seeking evidence. While we recognise that the inquiry is focusing on the potential impact of recent Government announcements relating to the proposed extension of Right to Buy, rent caps and welfare reform on housing associations, we are concerned that the focus of the inquiry will be primarily on the impact on housing associations' ability to continue to operate in terms of continued organisational viability. This is an important aspect of the impact of the proposed changes and one of obvious concern to individual housing associations. However, in our view, the inquiry also needs to assess the continued ability of housing associations to meet the full range of housing needs and especially the needs of the most disadvantaged households, provision for whom has historically been the primary objective of most associations, an objective which is in many cases embedded in the charitable objectives of associations. It is evident from statements in the professional press and no doubt also from individual submissions you are receiving, that many housing associations can continue to be financially viable by adapting their policies, for example through changing the focus of their development programme away from homes affordable by those in greatest need to forms of market provision, to change the geographical focus of their activity or to dispose of existing housing stock. Our group is concerned that the Committee also focuses on the wider impact of the proposals on the existing tenants of housing associations in terms of the quality of management and maintenance and more broadly on the ability of Associations to respond to households in housing need. The affordability of both the existing housing association stock as well as new supply must be central to any inquiry. Given the absence of a Government housing strategy which seeks to relate its interventions and use of resources to responding to the full range of housing needs, it is important to recognise that while individual organisations may propose policies and programmes which are most viable for their organisational survival, the aggregate of such organisational strategies does not provide a satisfactory response to assessed housing requirements.

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Our group is not in a position to comment on the impact of specific policies on individual housing associations. Housing associations are themselves best placed to make informed comments, though given the absence of detail as to the Government's specific proposals, any such responses are both preliminary and to a certain extent speculative. We did however wish to draw the wider issue to the attention of the committee.

Footnote

The Highbury Group is an independent group of specialists from public, private and independent sectors from housing, planning and related professions which prepares proposals for Government and other agencies on policy options for optimising the output of housing including affordable housing.

The group was established in 2008. The group now meets at the University of Westminster, London. It comprises the following core members: Duncan Bowie -University of Westminster (convener); Stephen Ashworth – SRN Denton ; Julia Atkins - London Metropolitan University; Bob Colenutt - Northampton Institute for Urban Affairs ; Kathleen Dunmore - Three Dragons ; Michael Edwards - Bartlett School of Planning, UCL; Deborah Garvie SHELTER ; Stephen Hill - C20 Futureplanners ; Angela Housham - Consultant ; Andy von Bradsky -PRP ; Seema Manchanda – planning consultant; Tony Manzi - University of Westminster; James Stevens - HomeBuilders Federation ; Peter Studdert – Planning consultant ; Janet Sutherland - JTP Cities; Paul Watt - Birkbeck College ; Nicholas Falk- URBED; Catriona Riddell – Planning Officers Society; Richard Donnell – Hometrack; Pete Redman – Housing Futures; Richard Simmons - independent consultant; Richard Blyth /Joe Kilroy – RTPI ; Shane Brownie – National Housing Federation; Stephen Battersby- Pro-Housing Alliance; Roger Jarman – Consultant/ Housing Quality Network; Richard Bate- Green Balance; Eric Sorensen; Ken Bartlett; David Waterhouse- Design Council/CABE; Martin Crookston; Chris Shepley; Kath Scanlon – LSE; Nicky Morrison – University of Cambridge; Glen Bramley- Heriot Watt University; Tim Marshall – Oxford Brookes University. Alisdair Chant- Berkeley Group.

The views and recommendations of the Highbury Group as set out in this and other papers are ones reached collectively through debate and reflect the balance of member views. They do not necessarily represent those of individual members or of their employer organisations.

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