

## **A NEW DEAL FOR SOCIAL HOUSING**

### **Response from the Highbury Group on Housing Delivery.**

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 has considered the Government's consultation paper. We strongly welcome the recognition of the positive role of social housing and the need to maintain and increase the supply of social housing. We support the strengthening of both legislation and regulatory standards to improve both the physical standards and safety of social housing (especially in relation to the reduction of fire risk) and the quality of housing management by both local authorities and housing associations and consider that the focus of the new housing regulator should be primarily on the safety of residents and the quality of their living conditions, rather than on the financial viability of the landlord organisations, although we recognise that this is also of importance.

We regret that the consultation paper does not adequately consider means to maintain and increase the supply of social housing. We consider that a review of the impact of Right to Buy legislation including discounts is long overdue, and while welcoming recent changes in Homes England's and the Mayor of London's arrangements for funding sub-market housing to provide some funding for council and housing association housing at social rents and with secure tenancies, the Government should undertake a comprehensive review of the impact of all its housing and regeneration funding programmes, to assess which programmes have the most positive impact on meeting the needs of those households who are in greatest need of secure and affordable housing. Such a review would raise questions about the impact of schemes to support sub-market home ownership and rented provision at up to 80% of market rents. The Government review should consider reintroduction of definitions of affordable housing for both funding programme and planning purposes, which relate to household income levels for different target groups, rather than to market value and market rents. It is our view that the benefits of any increased tenant role in the management of social housing will be of limited benefit until both the quantum and application of financial support for both existing and new social housing are revised.

While welcoming the government's recognition that the stigma applying to social housing and social housing tenants should be removed, it should be recognised that this stigma largely derives from the policies and rhetoric of successive governments. We therefore consider it unfortunate that in a consultation paper on 'a new deal for social housing' that the Government has chosen to include a chapter on increasing home ownership. Home ownership, even if access is increased at the margins, is not a solution to meeting the housing needs of those households who have incomes and assets significantly below the levels at which access to market housing for sale is an option, and for the Government to imply otherwise is misleading. Social housing needs to be seen as a valid tenure in its own right and not just a springboard to home ownership.

Note: 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. The group's

core membership and previous statements and research presentations are on the group's website:  
<https://www.westminster.ac.uk/highbury-group-on-housing-delivery>

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