

The Better Social Housing Review

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



INTRODUCTION

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 provided by housing associations in England. The review was to culminate in a series of practical recommendations by the end of 2022.

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.

This executive summary includes the key recommendations made by the panel in December 2022 following the review. The full report is available to read at www.bettersocialhousingreview.org.uk.



THE KEY RECOMMENDATIONS



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.



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