

Social Housing (Regulation) Bill

Briefing for second reading

The second reading debate of the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill takes place on 27 June in the House of Lords.

Summary

- CIH welcomes the Bill's focus on the key objectives of safety, transparency and accountability of landlords to tenants in social housing, as set out in the *charter for social housing residents: social housing white paper*. It is important that the robust measures set out in the draft bill in supporting those aims are maintained through to the final act.
- The regulator will gather performance information on landlords that will be useful to tenants. We believe this should also be used proactively by landlords in engaging with tenants, and more should be done to ensure this is accessible and useful to tenants, including, where necessary, performance improvement plans.
- A named health and safety lead will be required in every registered provider, and resources provided to ensure they can fulfil their functions of advice to boards; however, apart from this role there is no consideration or measurement of skills, knowledge, and experience of other housing staff. This is a noticeable gap, given the ongoing review of professionalism, and the acknowledgement of the importance of skilled staff in the government's green and white papers. CIH's work with *See the Person* (now *Stop Social Housing Stigma*) also identified the qualities, knowledge, and skills of staff at all levels within housing organisations as significant in appropriate engagement with tenants and addressing stigma.

Comment on key elements of the Bill

Proactive regulation and enforcement

The Bill provides a strong legislative framework to ensure that the tenant and landlord relationship is strengthened, with increased accountability to tenants backed by a proactive consumer standard and powers for the regulator. We believe that this provides a robust mechanism to drive improved standards across registered providers, that will encourage the sector as a whole to look at and learn from the many organisations that are working well with their tenants to deliver good homes, neighbourhoods, and services.

We are keen to see that the measures in the bill that support this strong, proactive approach to the consumer standard and accountability to residents are carried through to the final Act.

Setting high expectations

The bill ensures that the regulator can require applicants to be registered to demonstrate that they will meet regulatory requirements from the outset, and that failure to meet standards is added to reasons for mandatory de-registration. CIH has called for standards that apply across the board for tenants whatever the type of landlords, so we are pleased to see a broader application

of the standards and tools to tackle poor performance across non/ for profit, and local authority housing.

Inspections

We support measures to enable the regulator's ability to step in quickly, where there is reason to believe through failure to comply, failure to act or other error, there may be risk to tenants' health and safety. This is encompassed in the removal of the serious detriment test and the power to undertake a survey with 48 hours' notice rather than 28 days, plus the power to order repairs, where necessary. This provides important powers to enact in an emergency; it is vital that the regulator is well resourced to undertake wider inspections on a regular basis, underpinned and informed by the body of evidence that will come from proactive monitoring of the consumer standards and regular reporting on the Tenant Satisfaction Measures, as well as from the investigations and reports of the Housing Ombudsman.

Information

The regulator and housing ombudsman together are important partners in ensuring that registered providers deliver homes and services that are safe and of good quality, well managed and delivered with services that take account of the priorities of their tenants, through active tenant involvement.

Transparency and accessibility of performance information to the regulator and to tenants, so that they can see how their landlord is performing is a main aim of the social housing white paper, underpinned by powers in the bill for the regulator to direct what information landlords must provide, when etc. It is important that this information on financial measures, performance and the tenant satisfaction measures are easily available to tenants if they are to hold landlords to account, although CIH has raised concerns about how the information is published, given the diversity of the sector (see more in our consultation response, where we argue the value in tracking how well a landlord improves on its own performance and response to tenants over time). Consideration should be given as to how tenants will be alerted should any poor performance lead to the regulator requiring a performance improvement plan; the bill calls for landlords to provide a copy should a tenant require one, but a more proactive engagement with tenants on what this is, why it came about, and what they can expect for progress would be more in keeping with the aim of the white paper.

About CIH

The Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) is the independent voice for housing and the home of professional standards. Our goal is simple - to provide housing professionals and their organisations with the advice, support, and knowledge they need. CIH is a registered charity and not-for-profit organisation. This means that the money we make is put back into the organisation and funds the activities we carry out to support the housing sector. We have a diverse membership of people who work in both the public and private sectors, in 20 countries on five continents across the world.

Further information is available at: www.cih.org

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