

THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA

HOUSING AND PROPERTY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 20 JANUARY 2011

REPORT BY THE HEAD OF HOUSING

LOCAL DECISION: A FAIRER FUTURE FOR SOCIAL HOUSING CONSULTATION

The consultation document *Local Decisions: A Fairer Future for Social Housing* details fundamental changes to social housing. The Department of Communities and Local Government has requested consultation responses by 17 January 2011.

FOR COMMENT

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The consultation document *Local Decisions: A Fairer Future for Social Housing* details fundamental changes to social housing.
- 1.2 The key objective behind the proposed social housing reform are: 'Localism, fairness and focusing social housing on those most in need in a way that enables them to use it as a springboard to opportunity'¹.
- 1.3 The Department of Communities and Local Government ran a consultation on proposed changes to social housing from 22 November, closing on 17 January 2011.
- 1.4 Due to the response date of the consultation, this report is being presented to Scrutiny Committee to inform Members about the proposed changes and the response sent by the Council to the consultation.

2. Summary of the consultation document

- 2.1 The proposed changes to social housing, as detailed in the paper *Local Decisions: A Fairer Future For Social Housing*, are to the following areas:

¹ Local decisions: a fairer future for social housing p17

- **Tenure**, which include the ability for social landlords to issue fixed term tenancies and the introduction of a new Affordable Rent option for Registered Providers;
- **Allocating social housing**, with the proposed changes allowing local authorities to choose who is registered on their waiting lists;
- **Homelessness duty**, which can be ended with the offer of a 12 month tenancy in the private rented sector (with no consent from the applicant);
- **Mobility** within the social housing sector, which the proposed changes aim to increase;
- **Overcrowding**, with the consultation seeking views on existing powers;
- **Empty homes**, with incentives proposed to reduce the number of empty homes;
- **Regulation of social housing**, with the Localism Bill confirming the abolition of the Tenant Services Authority and the changed role of the Homes and Communities Agency; and
- **Reform of housing finance**, which will be announced in detail in a policy document at the end of January.

2.2 A copy of the consultation document and the consultation questions can be found in Appendix 1.

2.3 The Localism Bill (currently before parliament) provides the necessary legislative change to support the proposals.

3. Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea response to the consultation

3.1 The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea welcome the opportunity to comment on the proposed changes to social housing.

3.2 We broadly agree with the changes which are proposed and fully support the freedoms the proposed changes will grant to local authorities and landlords to make the most efficient use of their social housing stock, in a way reflective of both local need and individual circumstance. The proposed changes embed the principles of localism within social housing, by giving local and landlord control over housing issues.

3.3 The ability to issue fixed term tenancies, as well as local control over waiting lists and the setting of local strategic tenancies policy, will be a way to achieve not only greater mobility, but also make better use of a limited resource targeted at those most in need.

3.4 Locally there are concerns about how some of the proposed changes will interact with the earlier announced Local Housing Allowance

(LHA) cap levels, the possible implications of differential terms and tenancy policies between landlords, and in particular the unsuitability of the Affordable Rent model in a high-value borough such as the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

- 3.5 The full consultation response, authorised by Councillor Coleridge, Cabinet Member for Housing and Property, and including answers to the detailed questions asked as part of the consultation can be found in Appendix 2.

Appendix 2 will be sent to Members of the Scrutiny Committee subsequent to the main agenda despatch.

FOR COMMENT

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Background Papers used in the Preparation of this Report: None

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