

Housing Task & Finish Working Group calls for evidence into social housing in the Borough of Newcastle under Lyme

20th June 2023

The Housing Task & Finish Working Group, has begun to examine the condition of and regulation of social housing in the Borough.

Social housing is rented at below-market rates by Registered Providers (RPs). There are 19 providers of social housing within the Borough. The total number of social homes are 9,909. There 8,687 general needs homes, 948 special homes (supported or older people accommodation) and 274 Low cost Homes. The majority of providers have a small number of units. Those with a significant number of properties are Aspire Housing, Honeycomb Group Ltd and Sanctuary Housing Association.

The Working Group will examine issues about the quality of social housing, in particular damp and mould [following the Awaab Ishak case in Rochdale], but also with a focus on the relationship that RPs have with the Regulator of Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman.

Terms of reference

The Working Group welcomes evidence submissions, in writing, on the terms of reference outlined below.

The closing date for written submissions is set for **14th July 2023**, if this deadline, cannot be met, RPs are expected to make a submission explaining why the information is not available and by what date it could be submitted to the Working Group.

The Working Group seeks evidence on the quality of social housing in the Borough and the effectiveness of the regulatory regime; in particular, the inquiry seeks answers to the following questions:

- How many complaints have been made to the Housing Ombudsman about the quality of social housing within the Borough, the nature of these complaints and how these were addressed?
- What is the impact on social housing providers' resources, and therefore their ability to maintain and improve their housing stock, of the need to remediate building safety risks and retrofit their homes to make them more energy efficient?

- How does the RP fulfil its obligations under the Neighbourhood and Community Standard, as required by the Social Housing Regulator, and does this present any particular issues to the organisations?
- What is the relationship that the RP's has with the social housing regulator? How often are they audited and the housing inspected and what was the outcome of the most recent inspection?
- Are there any issues that the RPs have with their framework and processes to allow tenants to effectively resolve issues?
- A number of reforms are proposed in the social housing White Paper to improve the regime, what are the views of RPs on these changes?
- What challenges do social housing providers expect to face (diversification of the sector, economic changes – interest rates) in the near future and their potential impacts?

The Working Group is not seeking at this stage policy documentation in respect of the various issues that the RPs deal such as; health and safety fire risk assessment etc., it is interested in knowing what issues RP's face and the problems that they pose. The group would value qualitative responses to the questions proposed as it will inform the Council's work programme going forward.

Chair's comment

Cllr Robert Bettley-Smith said: "Social Housing is a vital component of the housing stock within the borough to meet the needs of individuals and families that otherwise would face difficulties finding somewhere to live. Therefore, as a Borough Council we need to ensure their needs are met and that the quality of housing they are provided with is adequate to meet statutory requirements and, just as importantly, the needs of those living in social housing. As a Fellow of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, and a former owner and manager of let housing (including social housing), I am driven to ensure Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council does what we can to make things better for people."

Further information

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