



Sector Update – July 2022

New Housing Ministers

The government has appointed a new housing secretary and housing minister after Michael Gove was sacked and Stuart Andrew resigned.

Greg Clarke has been named the new secretary of state for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities – returning to a job he held for one year between 2015 and 2016 under prime minister David Cameron. The Tunbridge Wells MP also served as business secretary for three years, until 2019, under Theresa May.

Marcus Jones, MP for Nuneaton, has meanwhile been named as the next junior housing minister. Jones is also returning to the department, having been under secretary of state for local government between 2015 and 2018. Most recently Jones was vice-chamberlain of HM Household, and before that an assistant whip.

Housing Ombudsman

The Housing **Ombudsman has been** issuing more maladministration notices in the sector and publicising their findings alongside tools to help support landlord performance. Without doubt, customer's complaints should be dealt with promptly and efficiently and the Ombudsman is using their powers where this isn't the case. They have an ongoing focus on damp and mould; and a new focus on Noise Complaints.

Tenant Satisfaction Measures

Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) is introducing new ways to monitor tenants' satisfaction with their home, neighbourhood and services. We await the final version of the TSM which are due to be implemented from April 2023.

Right to Buy

The Government have announced their intention to extend the **RIGHT TO BUY** scheme. This is what we know so far:

- The Right to Buy scheme will be extended to housing association tenants, with government pledging to build a new social home for every one sold;
- Universal Credit reform will incentivise more people to save for a house deposit; and
- A review of the mortgage lending market will aim to turn more of 'Generation Rent' into 'Generation Buy'.

Cost of Living Crisis Payment

Government has announced support for people on low incomes to help with the cost of living crisis. Almost all of the eight million most vulnerable households across the UK will receive support of at least £1,200 this year, including a new one-off £650 cost of living payment. Universal support is also due to increase to £400, as the October discount on energy bills is doubled and the requirement to repay it over five years is scrapped.

Private Renters Bill

THE NEW DEAL FOR PRIVATE RENTERS BILL has been released. It is primarily aimed at the private rented sector. Interestingly, the abolition of the Section 21 'no fault eviction' notices is included. As the main cause of homelessness in this country is the loss of a private rented tenancy, this new Bill has the potential to significantly reduce homelessness. We await this with interest.

NHF/CIH Joint Working

The Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) and National Housing Federation (NHF) have set up an **INDEPENDENT PANEL** to make recommendations to improve housing associations' trust and reputation. This group, chaired by Helen Baker from Shelter, will comprise of people with lived experience and expertise in social housing. It will meet over the summer with residents, community leaders, and other partners, including local authority housing providers, to consider improvement actions that can be taken so that residents always receive the high-quality services they deserve. The Panel will consider wider factors affecting social housing and consider how these issues may have impacted on quality. Trust in the sector has been shaken by instances of poor-quality housing. As the professional body for the sector, CIH are committed to supporting our members to deliver changes that will improve stock and customer experience for all.

Rent Setting Policy

Flagship were invited to take part in a task and finish group with the NHF about the **RENT SETTING POLICY POST 2025**. A separate briefing is available on Board App and we will expect a consultation within the next 12-18 months.

Social Housing Regulation Bill

The Social Housing Regulation Bill has been published. The main implications are::

1. The Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) will be required to set up an **ADVISORY PANEL** that will provide the RSH with information and advice on anything related to its work that "could have a significant impact" on social landlords or the provision of social housing.
2. Underperforming social landlords will be subject to "Ofsted- style" **INSPECTIONS** carried out by the RSH with only 48 hours' notice compared to the current 28 days. Tenants will be given 24 hours' notice. Magistrates will be able to issue warrants to gain access and it will be an offence to stop the inspector entering the property.

3. The bill grants RSH powers to issue social landlords with '**PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT PLAN NOTICES**' if they fail to meet standards, if there is a risk they will fail to meet standards and if it fails to provide documents or information the RSH has asked for. The social landlord will then have to prepare a plan on how it is going to address any issues and send it to the regulator.
4. The bill has given the RSH the power to carry out **EMERGENCY WORKS** on properties, for which the social landlord will have to pay. Tenants must be given 24 hours' notice before the works are carried out. The social landlord will have 28 days to pay the regulator for the emergency works and any other costs related to them.
5. The government launched a consultation on **INTRODUCING ELECTRICAL SAFETY STANDARDS** to the social housing sector last week. Matt Smith is leading the Groups' response working with Phil Willgress (Flagship Services) and Liam Winter (Gasway). The deadline is 31st August.
6. Every registered provider will have to appoint a **HEALTH AND SAFETY LEAD**. The health and safety lead will monitor whether the landlord is complying with health and safety rules and assess whether it is at risk of non-compliance. The health and safety lead will then notify the regulator of any risks and failures to comply.
7. Housing associations, which unlike councils are not currently subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000, will now be subject to **A FREEDOM OF INFORMATION-STYLE** information-sharing process, though it seems only for tenants and not the wider public.
8. The bill includes the removal of the '**SERIOUS DETRIMENT**' TEST, which blocks the RSH from intervening over consumer standards unless it suspects tenants are at risk of serious harm.
9. The regulator can now ask social landlords to **COLLECT AND PUBLISH INFORMATION RELATING TO THEIR COMPLIANCE PERFORMANCE**.
10. The **HOUSING OMBUDSMAN WAS GRANTED NEW POWERS** –a complaint-handling failure order and a new code of practice. This is to ensure that a landlord's complaint-handling process is accessible and consistent and it also legally allows the watchdog to order a landlord to review its policies on specific issues.