



## The future of social housing

Five UK housing association tenants gathered at the 2015 Chartered Institute of Housing conference in Manchester to scrutinise national housing policy. Interviewing leading people in the housing sector, the Scrutiny Live team examined three key areas – social housing supply, affordability and tenant involvement – particularly identified as important in a national survey carried out by the National Tenant Organisations. This summary document sets out findings and recommendations for Government and the social housing sector.

1

**Tenants have valuable opinions and insight - not being heard in national policy debate. It is the duty of, and in the interests of, housing providers to support their tenants to get their voices heard.**

Scrutiny Live heard that tenants want to be heard and that their voices can add real value to decision making at national and local level. However, tenants do not feel they have been consulted sufficiently on national policy issues in the last five years. The Panel was frustrated that the National Tenant Voice was dissolved by Government in 2010.

Locally tenants referred to good tenant engagement by some landlords, but the survey showed a long way to go for others.

Nationally there is a common misconception that tenants aren't interested in national policy issues, and so few landlords support their tenants to have a say nationally. In some cases, the survey found that tenants' views are not always the same as their landlords. Some tenants support some of the Government's changes.

### **Recommendation to Government:**

We are sending this report to the Communities and Housing Ministers, asking them to meet with national tenant representatives.

### **Recommendation to landlords:**

Engage with your tenants on national issues. Support them to have their say. Don't assume you know what they want you to say.

2

**The biggest barrier to successful social housing is the attitude of the press, politicians and public to social housing tenants**

Social housing is a treasured valuable asset that allows the UK to house the weakest and vulnerable in our society. Those who participated in Scrutiny Live agreed that we need to be doing a lot more to reflect the truth, the vibrant communities, the positive good that social housing does.

### **Recommendation to Government:**

Understand and present the positive benefits of social housing. Combat the prevailing blanket myths about the people living in social housing.

### **Recommendation to landlords:**

Work with your tenants to publicise tenant achievements and the strength of tenant communities rather than just focussing on the achievements of the landlord.

In particular, support your tenants to make contributions to **#housingday2015** to be held on **18<sup>th</sup> November 2015**, under the theme **Proud to be a tenant**

**3**

**There is a need for debate about what social housing is and who it's for. Where will the poor, weak and vulnerable live in future if housing providers end up solely targeting higher income customers?**

Changing funding and support programmes mean that most social housing providers are refocusing their businesses towards higher income customers. Their ability to house the weak and vulnerable will decline, resulting in the loss of the sustainability and stability social housing provides. This will result in many human tragedies and a huge long term potential financial cost to taxpayers.

**4**

**The growing lack of affordability and support could result in increases in homelessness, particularly amongst young people, community breakdown, poor health, more crime and other social problems**

Tenants are concerned about whether *affordable rents* are really affordable for low income tenants. Alongside changes to tax credits and welfare, this could lead to homelessness, increases in unemployment and people trapped in welfare dependency. Some tenants support the Government's Right to Buy proposals, but there are concerns about whether homes lost will be replaced with homes that low income tenants can afford. Tenants are particularly concerned about the cuts to benefits for young people, and the consequences for society of increasing numbers of young people living on the streets.

**5**

**The UK needs a long term housing strategy that balances short term potential savings against long term costs to society. Social housing should play an important role alongside other tenures.**

Scrutiny Live found evidence of the need for a long term housing strategy. Tenants who already have stable tenancies listed the supply of social housing as their top priority, and a strong economic case was presented by panellists for long term support for social housing. Tenants support initiatives to provide homes for people through a variety of tenures, but this should not be at the expense of providing social housing. Property ownership should certainly not be seen as a measure of whether citizens can participate in the UK's democracy.

**Recommendation to Government:**

Re-evaluate and understand the important role that social housing plays in society. Develop a balanced and sustainable national housing strategy that supports all tenures, including social housing.

**Recommendation to landlords:**

Remain true to the values of the social housing sector to provide homes to the weak and vulnerable in society.

*The Scrutiny Live team thanks the following for their support: the many tenants who responded to the survey, e-mailed or blogged, or participated in other ways; the panellists at the CIH conference; the National Tenant Organisations, the Centre for Public Scrutiny, TPAS, the Treehouse at CIH Conference, Soha Housing, New Charter Housing, Community Gateway Association, Phoenix Community Housing, 20/20 Housing Co-op.*

**The full Scrutiny Live report is available at [www.scrutinylive.wordpress.com](http://www.scrutinylive.wordpress.com)**