



The latest views from Alistair McIntosh, Chief Executive, Housing Quality Network

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What a great housing system

I watched Steve McQueen's Mangrove film last night on the eve of the White Paper. The opening shots were of Grenfell scraping out into the North Kensington skyline as the Westway tore the community in half. At night, the streets were deadly quiet, much as they were when I got there in the early eighties. 400 years by Bob Marley and the Wailers was on the soundtrack. Is this a sign? Will I ever see the White Paper? Three years is bad enough, but is 400 years the new deadline?

Nope, I got up in the morning and there it was. What do I think?

It's one helluva improvement over the early drafts. Well done to the civil servants, regulators, ombudsman, tenants and others who have put a shift in. Thanks.

Of course it has weaknesses. The first is the lack of ambition. But that's because the British state machinery is now so poor.

In his preface the PM harks back to poor council housing in Wolverhampton in the eighties. Tony Blair found much the same thing in Hackney at the time. To sort it out, Tony came up with an integrated system of inspecting housing services and rewarding those that were up to scratch with money to fix the homes. There were carrots and sticks. This time around there are only sticks. If you foul up you get fined. If you do well you don't even get a rosette.

The other issue is that the Tories do love homeownership. In the days of yore the right to buy won them elections. So, we have the obligatory chapter on boosting homeownership. Except it's not really homeownership these days. A lot of the time we're offering flats on leases. This arrangement makes no one happy. If the horse runs to form, Keir Starmer will be picking up these votes.

Then we turn to the challenge for us. We can play the ostrich and rely on the fact that the new inspection regime is three to four years away. That's roughly how long all the legal changes will take. Or we can work together to boost standards ourselves. We don't need to hang around in a never-ending talking shop. Speak to your residents pronto. Find out what others are up to. Some social landlords are doing it for themselves. In another blog I've set out all the main tasks. We can do this.



The RSH will be recruiting a director of consumer standards shortly. Let's get behind this person and not bog them down with clever clogs technical questions. If we get it right then we won't face the clampdown that Joe Strummer, a onetime Westway busker, warned us against.

