

Blog

The Housing Quality Network

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Opinion: The White Paper versus the Green Paper — Spot the difference

*More than two years after the government consulted on plans to reform the social housing sector in the well-received Green Paper, it has finally produced a White Paper setting out its policy agenda. Here **Leslie Channon, former chair of the 'A Voice for Tenants' steering group**, looks at what's been quietly dropped.*

At first glance, there are several things missing from the Social Housing White Paper that were main themes in the original Green Paper published back in 2018.

Stigma

The Social Housing Green Paper (SHGP) devoted an entire chapter to addressing the issue of stigmatisation, yet there is no mention of tackling stigma in the White Paper let alone it being one of the driving forces for a fundamental culture change within the sector.

Worryingly, chapter 7 of the White Paper is devoted to promoting homeownership as an ambition every social housing tenant should aspire to, which in my view only helps to exacerbate the issue of stigma by promoting the idea that someone living in social housing is at the bottom of the property ladder.

Back in 2017/18, I helped to co-facilitate seven of the 10 ministerial roadshows and not once did I hear homeownership as a priority. It was never in the top 10 issues raised by tenants, yet stigma was consistently in the top three. Even the government's own summary of responses to the Green Paper stated: "Stigma was the most consistent theme raised by residents at the engagement events."

The question, therefore, is why has it been dropped?

A National Voice for Tenants

Then Prime Minister Theresa May emphatically declared in the House of Commons: "Long after the TV cameras have gone, and the world has moved on, let the legacy of this awful tragedy be that we resolve never to forget these people and instead gear our policies and our thinking towards making their lives better and bringing them into the political process."

As the former chair of the 'A Voice for Tenants' campaign, we were delighted to hear the Prime Minister recognise the need to bring tenants into the political process. We were further encouraged when the question was asked in the SHGP, "Is there a need for a stronger representation for residents on a national level?" (Chapter 3, question 75, pg.36).

The MHCLG's summary of responses document states, "71% of respondents said there is a need for a stronger representation for residents at a national level" – yet there is zero mention in the White Paper of any provision for tenants to do that.

Building Social Homes for Social Rent

Theresa May stated in the forward of the SHGP that she recognised the need for "...building a new generation of council homes to help fix the broken housing market...access [to the] money they need to build homes for social rent...this Green paper will provide a further boost to the number of council houses".

There is no provision in here for the building of social homes for social rent.

Making the business case for resident involvement

The SHGP (pg. 35 n:70) highlighted: "Effective resident engagement can benefit everyone – landlords and residents as well as the wider community. [A detailed study by the University of Westminster](#) showed a strong correlation between involving residents and delivering value for money."

Tony Manzi, my MA dissertational advisor, was the lead on this DCLG-commissioned study in 2015, which showed that Amicus Horizon (now Optivo) was able to actively demonstrate £2.2m savings a year due to their resident involvement structures. I was disappointed to see that the White Paper did not tie in resident involvement with a VFM measure of some kind. I think it would have been an easy way to demonstrate the correlation between VFM and resident involvement.

The research showed that if you ask residents what they want and include them in the decision making, you will have less complaints, demonstrate VFM, and a co-regulatory framework that works. It is a win-win, in my opinion. A missed opportunity.

Shared ownership, leasehold being advertised under the guise of homeownership

When my parents bought their home, they could afford to purchase it on one salary whilst my mother was able to stay home. This option is no longer the case, because today most people cannot afford to buy in the conventional way unless they have a huge down-payment or support from the 'bank of mum and dad'. The open housing market is out reach for so many. As the government has acknowledged itself, the housing market is broken!

This is the reason why the whole sector is calling for more social homes at social rent to be built!

With that said, I think it is fundamentally wrong to tout leasehold shared ownership as homeownership, because it is not.

Many people have found that becoming a shared owner is not what they anticipated it to be – look at the #leaseholderscandal and #endourcladdingscandal. We heard many harrowing stories from leaseholders during this year's #HousingDay, and it was indeed heart breaking.

In addition, many houses for outright sale are being sold as leasehold not freehold. It is a money-making business. On the other hand, social housing with a secure tenancy at social rent is a home for life, and repairs and maintenance are taken care of by the landlord.

I am going to write a follow up blog that focuses on the positives of the White Paper, and there are many things to celebrate. I do believe, even with all the disappointments I have highlighted in this blog, there is a glimmer of hope going forward.