

TFP have been closely involved in the research, ideas gathering and structure of this much awaited document through the active tenant participation program that has enabled States Tenants representatives to collectively engage with senior Housing Department management in a partnership process that will ultimately create a Social Housing ethos fit for the 21st Century.

The establishment of a Strategic Housing Unit which would remain within the States structure (whilst the Housing Department itself moved outside) in order to manage and deliver future Island wide housing policy, will be a much needed champion for the supply of new homes and manage the Affordable Housing Gateway. The data from the Gateway would then be used by the Strategic Housing Unit to evidence the demand for more homes and also to develop new affordable purchase housing schemes.

TFP would endorse and encourage the awarding of contracts to wholly owned local companies and would seek evidence of the creation of apprenticeships in the various building trades as part of the contract award.

The White Paper proposal about the Housing Department being transferred to a 'Housing Association' wholly owned by the States and set outside the current government structure, but with the same staff so that the Department's experience and expertise was not lost, was regarded by the majority of States Tenants' as the most acceptable proposal.

A proposal to remove the 'hidden subsidy' within the fair rents and bring rents in the social sector back to 10% below the market rent, which had been the original intention of the policy, has been one of the tenants main concerns with regard to rent policy and the financial impact this may have on them due to increases based on the market rental level and how the new Housing Association would be placed on a better financial footing going forward.

Notwithstanding the intention to re-set the rents at 10% below the market for all social housing stock, TFP request the Housing Department to work very closely with the Social Security Department to ensure that the rent component of Income Support would be increased in the social sector to match the new rents. The intention was that anyone living in social housing who was in receipt of Income Support would be fully protected from these changes.

TFP recognise the key message from this proposal of the removal of "hidden rental subsidies" is a commitment to bring all social rented homes up to the UK Decent Homes standard within the next 10 years – and to maintain them at that standard going forward. Clearly this level of work needed to be paid for and, whilst it was envisaged that the new Housing Association would be able to borrow, the rents charged would need to be sufficient to pay back such borrowing.

TFP are concerned for tenants who were not in receipt of Income Support and that the Housing Department would carry out a financial impact assessment to ensure that the removal of this hidden subsidy was properly targeted. Before any rents were actually re-set to the higher level, every tenant affected by the rental changes should be offered the opportunity to apply to be means tested that would be designed to assist those tenants not on Income Support. The intention is to agree a staged withdrawal of the 'hidden subsidy' over a period as long as ten years, if that was what was required.

TFP are assured that Tenants would not be forced to complete the means test and those that did would not be asked to leave social housing regardless of their financial situation.

The White Paper would need to offer reassurance with regard to Tenants' rights and the terms and conditions of the tenancy agreement. Existing tenancies should not be affected and tenants would not have to move home or sign a new tenancy agreement.

The new Housing Association would need to ensure an appropriate governance structure and services delivered with tenant involvement and customer focus.

The following things which were important to tenants:

- “having security of tenure”
- “tenants rights”
- “affordable housing”
- “the many ways I can pay my rent”
- “good housing services, like tackling anti-social behaviour”
- “a warm, secure and safe home”
- “the emergency maintenance service”
- “help with medical adaptations”
- “being able to transfer to other properties within the stock”
- “the response repair service”
- “services are run locally, with friendly staff”
- “homes are only offered to those who need them”

Tenants’ comments on improvements needed, such as:

- “my home is tired and old”
- “a louder voice - ask my opinion more often and value my feedback”
- “improved customer care”
- “easier access to affordable housing”
- “better housing services”
- “more homes are needed”
- “there’s never enough money to do all the work”
- “better options to help me buy a home”
- “better facilities to meet with my housing officer”
- “There are no rules about social housing, so we aren’t always treated the same as Trust tenants”
- “I need more appropriate accommodation as I find the stairs difficult”