

HOUSING

SOCIAL HOUSING WHITE PAPER

The Social Housing White Paper 2020, subtitled “The charter for social housing residents”, was published last November. It set out a range of measures with the stated aim of rebalancing the relationship between social landlords and tenants. It followed a consultation on the Social Housing Green Paper 2018 which was published following the Grenfell Tower tragedy, partly in recognition of the failings of housing management and governance, and the failure to listen to residents which led to the tragedy.

This article highlights the main changes proposed, the gaps in the proposals and the LHG response.

The most significant parts of the White Paper relate to changes to the powers and responsibilities of the Regulator of Social Housing (‘Regulator’) and re-introduces inspection of all social landlords.

Overall, the proposals are a step forward in ensuring safety and value for money for residents, mostly through the re-introduction of inspection.

However, it will take until the publication of the new consumer standards and the outcome of the first round of these inspections to see whether the Regulator is able to require the scale of changes needed.

It’s important to note that the White Paper does not:

- provide necessary resources to the Regulator to enable this significant increase in activity.
- ensure significant grant funding for socially rented homes
- unlock the Right to Buy receipt restrictions which hold back Council homebuilding
- devolve decision making over ‘disposals’ – so Housing Associations can still sell their stock by seeking permission from central Government (and not from local authorities which are responsible for assessing and addressing housing need)
- require tenants to be part of formal governance of Housing Associations for example as Board members. While the proposals do suggest a further engagement programme, this has not been specified.
- specify the new consumer standards
- specify a new Decent Homes standard (this would follow) which would create the need for further investment (continued on page 2)

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- provide funding for further investment in existing social homes

Summary of proposals

The white paper sets out a new 'Charter' for social housing residents and proposes to bring forward legislation or policy change to meet the Charter's objectives:

1. To be safe in your home

- Legislate to strengthen the Regulator's objectives to include safety.
- Legislate to require social landlords to identify a nominated person responsible for complying with health and safety requirements.
- Expect the Regulator to prepare a *Memorandum of Understanding* with the Health and Safety Executive to ensure effective sharing of information with the Building Safety Regulator.
- Launch a consultation on requiring smoke alarms in social housing and introducing new expectations for carbon monoxide alarms.
- Consult on measures to protect social housing residents from harm caused by poor electrical safety.

2. To know how your landlord is performing

- Create a set of tenant satisfaction measures for landlords
- Introduce a new access to information scheme for social housing tenants of housing associations and other private registered providers of social housing
- Ensure landlords provide a clear breakdown of how their income is being spent.
- Require landlords to identify a senior person in their organisation who is responsible for ensuring they comply with the consumer standards set by the Regulator.

3. To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly

- Provide residents with consistency across landlord complaint handling by ensuring

landlords self- assess against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code

- Ensure tenants know how to raise complaints and have confidence in the system by launching a communications campaign.
- Legislate to ensure clear co-operation between the Housing Ombudsman and the Regulator of Social Housing to hold landlords to account more effectively when things go wrong.
- Make landlords more accountable for their actions by publicising the details of cases determined and published by the Housing Ombudsman.

4. To be treated fairly and with respect:

- Update the consumer regulation role of the Regulator so it monitors and ensures landlords' compliance with improved consumer standards.
- Remove the 'serious detriment test' and introduce routine inspections for the largest landlords (those with over 1,000 homes) every four years.
- Change the Regulator's objectives to cover safety and transparency and review its consumer standards
- Give the Regulator the power to publish a Code of Practice on the consumer standards to clarify what landlords are required to deliver.
- Strengthen the Regulator's enforcement powers to tackle failing landlords and to respond to new challenges facing the sector.
- Hold local authorities to account as landlords, including how they manage Arm's Length Management Organisations (ALMOs) and Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs).
- Require the regulator to set up an Advisory Committee to provide independent and unbiased advice on discharging its functions.

5. To have your voice heard by your landlord

- Expect the regulator to require landlords to seek out best practice and consider how they

(Continued from page 2)

can continually improve the way they engage with social housing tenants.

- Deliver a new opportunities and empowerment programme for social housing residents, to support engagement between landlords and residents, and to give residents tools to influence their landlords and hold them to account.
 - Review professional training and development to ensure residents receive a high standard of customer service.
- 6. To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in**
- Review the Decent Homes Standard, including the access to and quality of green spaces.
 - Tackle anti-social behaviour by enabling tenants to know who is responsible for action and who can support and assist them.
- 7. To be supported to take your first step to ownership**
- Implement a new model for Shared Ownership.
 - Implement a new Right to Shared Ownership for tenants of housing associations and other private registered providers who live in new grant funded homes for rent.
 - Introduce a new Affordable Homes Guarantee Scheme.

What you can do

- Find out whether your local authority submitted a response to the Social Housing Green Paper by asking a local Labour Councillor.
- Invite Labour Housing Group to come to your local branch or constituency Labour Party meeting to talk about Social Housing regulation policy.

Share your thoughts with LHG for inclusion in the newsletter or submit a pitch to Red Brick blog with suggested alternative policy proposals.

Rachel Blake (LHG Executive)

A LACK OF 'LEMON LAWS' LEAVES A SOUR TASTE



In the USA, the term "lemon laws" refers to consumer laws that get you your money back if you are "sold a lemon".

Typically, car sales feature.

It seems we have no equivalent when it comes to selling sub-standard homes.

Why else would people be demanding that the Government foot the bill for removing unsafe cladding? Why aren't the builders – or their insurers – simply required to stump-up in full and without delay?

Because there is a problem in expecting Government, i.e. *The Taxpayer*, to shoulder all this very sizeable responsibility.

The 'owners' – generally leaseholders – may currently possess a scarily devalued asset but if the appropriate works are carried out, their properties will probably gain significantly in value.

Yet their neighbours who are renting, on the other hand, will get a rent increase at some point – perhaps to cover the cost of all those waking watches.

And all those who are taxpayers will also be footing the Government's bill through their taxes.

We urgently need to ensure that both tenants and leaseholders have safe homes to live in, but is this an equitable division of costs and benefits?

Or, as the saying goes, do losses get nationalised while profits are privatised?

Paul Martin (Editor)
paulmartin@clara.co.uk



DANGEROUS CLADDING

The government must end this crisis now

By Thangam Debbonaire MP, Labour MP for Bristol West and Shadow Secretary of State for Housing.

As Shadow Secretary of State for Housing, I am extremely concerned about the remediation of unsafe cladding on residential blocks and the impact this is having on leaseholders.

I have been contacted by pregnant women trapped in dangerous flats, elderly people unable to move into retirement accommodation and families on the brink of bankruptcy after receiving five-figure bills for a problem they did not cause.

These are just a few of the [heart-breaking stories now common across the country](#).

Because the government response has been so painfully slow, hundreds of thousands of leaseholders across the country remain trapped in unsafe blocks during a third lockdown, facing increasing interim costs. When you look at the knock-on effects, including those unable to sell or re-mortgage their property, the number of people affected is much higher.

Broken Tory promises

This week, the government announced another package of measures to try to fix the cladding scandal. While headline-grabbing figure of £3.5 billion is a huge victory for Labour and the campaigners across the country who have



worked tirelessly on this, it will not protect many leaseholders from mounting debt.

For many of the people affected by this crisis, this latest announcement will feel like a betrayal. On at least 17 occasions, government ministers promised that leaseholders will not be left with the bill.

Sadly, these [promises have been broken by this week's announcement](#), which includes the detail that funds to fix buildings will only be given to those over 18 metres tall – and the residents of lower buildings will be forced to take out loans to pay to fix fire safety problems. You can watch my speech [here](#).

This is not the first time that leaseholders have been let down in this crisis. A year ago, the Chancellor said, “all unsafe combustible cladding will be removed from every private and social residential building above 18 metres high.” This has not happened. Buildings haven't been able to access the fund. Nine of every ten pounds has not been paid out.

Many of these problems stem from a refusal to properly evaluate the risks. Three and a half years on from the Grenfell Tower disaster, the government still has not done a proper investigation of the number of buildings involved, the risks or the cost of reducing that risk. Until we know the scale and nature of the problem, any response will be ineffectual.

Labour's plan

I am leading Labour's response to this problem and am working with campaigners and specialists from across this country – and in other countries too – to get justice for those affected.

[Last week I forced a vote in Parliament](#) calling [on the Government to](#): urgently establish the extent of dangerous cladding and prioritise buildings according to

DANGEROUS CLADDING (cont'd)

risk; provide upfront funding to ensure cladding remediation can start immediately; and protect leaseholders and taxpayers from the cost by pursuing those responsible for the cladding crisis. I am disappointed the government did not back the motion, [they chose to abstain](#) – despite [many backbench Tory MPs speaking out to protect leaseholders in their constituencies](#).

I believe the UK Government must establish a [National Cladding Taskforce](#) to address unsafe cladding and protect leaseholders from the costs of remediation. The Taskforce should be underpinned with strong powers to establish the full extent of dangerous materials on buildings, prioritise them according to risk and ensure there is enforcement against those who refuse to undertake works. It must be backed with up-front funding and include a legally enforceable deadline of 2022 to make all homes safe. There is more on Labour's plan [here](#).

What's next?

I spoke about the problems faced by leaseholders [on Question Time last week](#), when a member of the audience spoke about how she is trapped in

an unsafe flat, with no end in sight. I will be doing all I can to keep the pressure up and spur the government into action.

The next opportunity to force further changes out of the government will come on 24 February, when the Fire Safety Bill comes back to the Commons.

This date will be a chance for the Government to reflect on the failing of their latest announcement and bring forward a set of legally binding commitments to deliver on the promises they made to leaseholders.

I am hopeful that Conservative backbenchers will also see sense and vote with us. I am particularly encouraged by the response from some Tories this week, who were [vocal in their disappointment with Robert Jenrick's latest announcement](#).

Last week, Keir Starmer [challenged Boris Johnson](#) on this during Prime Minister's Questions. Justice for all those affected will continue to be one of my top priorities over the coming weeks and months.

This article was first published in [RedBrickBlog](#)

Andy Bates

In Conversation With...



Dr Halima Begum, Director of the [Runnymede Trust](#)

Date: Tuesday May 11th 2021 Time: 6.30pm

Dr Begum will be talking about how racial inequality and housing have interacted during the pandemic, and what we should do to give ourselves a more positive future.

Register for the event at <https://tinyurl.com/ICWDrBegum>

WHAT DO WE THINK OF...

FAIRER SHARE ? The Proportional Property Tax

This campaign presents a stylish website, a clever animation and a smart proposition, namely to replace the Council Tax with a "proportional property tax".

It makes the very valid point that the Government's failure to reassess property values "for 30 years" means that the current basis of calculation is seriously adrift of current house prices.

The outcome, it claims, is that residents of houses outside the nation's economic hotspots pay a far higher proportion of their value in Council tax.

What do they say it will cost you?

The campaign says the Proportional Property Tax will be "*a single flat rate tax charged annually at 0.48% of a property's value. So for example, a property valued at £200,000 would pay £960 each year. Those in valuable properties will have any increase capped at £1,200 per year on what is currently paid. When that property is sold the future owners will pay the full rate of 0.48%.*"

What would it replace?

The campaign says Council Tax, Stamp Duty and the Bedroom Tax would all go.

Who would it benefit?

The campaign focuses a lot on the difference in the percentage that tax is of the property value. For instance, it says, "the effective tax rate on residential property is just 0.2% in London compared to 0.7% in the North East".

Unfortunately, that doesn't easily translate into what your actual bill might be. It's essential claim to fame is a lower rate of tax for 75% of those paying it.

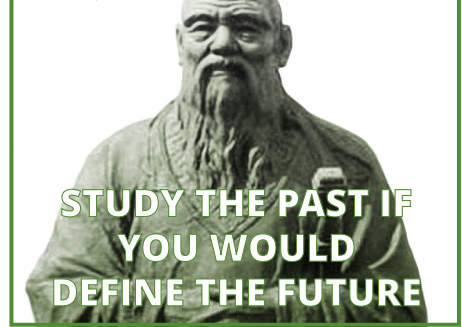
Whether that would bring in enough revenue to pay for Council services is another matter. London Local Authorities might have big concerns.

Who is behind this?

The money comes largely from the Woodhaven Trust whose key figure is Andrew Dixon, a venture capitalist.

Paul Martin

CONFUCIUS HE SAY...



VERY LITTLE REASSURANCE

One of the most satisfying aspects of being LHG Policy Officer has been commissioning and editing LHG Briefings. They have all been personal journeys of discovery for me, never having been a housing professional.

Our current work in progress is about *renting* and the "homework" has changed my perspective. For me, 1997 was a big year bringing not only promotion to a great new job but also a move to a new home. I now realise that it was, for perhaps millions of people, ***the beginning of the end for security of tenure.***

That's because, thanks to the Tories' 1996 Housing Act, from 27th February 1997 **Assured Shorthold Tenancies** became, in effect, the "default legal category of residential tenancy in England and Wales" which meant, in practice, that landlords could give two months' notice and evict even the best-behaved of tenants.

Clearly, Labour inherited this law but, with the benefit of hindsight, why was it still in force after three terms of Labour Government?

Do let me know if you have answers.

Paul Martin (Editor)
pauljmartin@clara.co.uk

VACANT POSSESSIONS

Banks based in the UK are looking to significantly reduce the office-space they occupy. Cuts have been announced of 40% at HSBC, 20% at Lloyds and "about a third" at Metrobank.

HSBC says it will keep its HQ in London's Canary Wharf, which houses around 10,000 staff. At least, that is, **until its lease comes up for renewal in 2027**, so the cuts will be made to its 66 offices in other areas.

There is already around 2 million sq ft of spare office space in Canary Wharf, while 18.5 million sq ft is available across central London as a whole.

What effect on homebuilding?

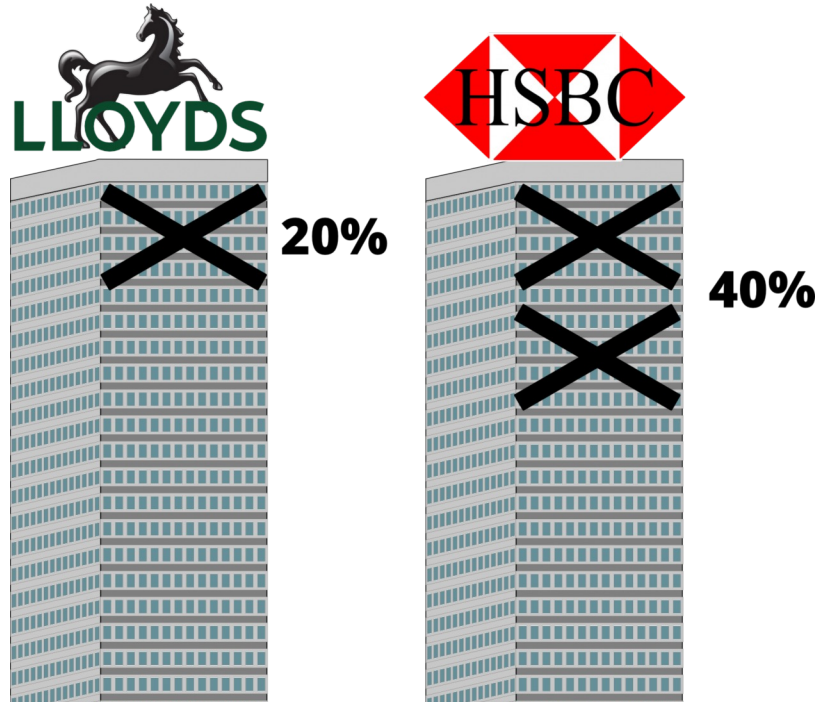
The centres of London and other big cities have experienced decline before, with a shift to outer suburbs and satellite towns.

The difference now is that the technology for white-collar workers to be based remotely has gained massively from the effect of the pandemic.

As a Lloyds spokesperson said, this was driven by expectations that there would be "a very different style of working than before".

The construction industry response has yet to be seen. On the face of it, a big reduction in developments like the 62-storey building at 22 Bishopsgate, London would benefit the supply of materials and skilled workers needed to build homes, but the skills and techniques needed may be mismatched.

Stephan J Mario



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I was a little surprised when I became involved in LHG to hear talk of the "***stigma of Council housing.***"

This was a novel idea to me, despite having lived more than half my life as a Council tenant.

Perhaps it is only in London that people prefer a properly-built, reasonably-priced and well-maintained home.

But then again, maybe not...

Paul Martin

LHG EXECUTIVE 2020

LHG's Executive was elected at the AGM 21st March 2020 for the two years to 2022.

Executive members

Andy Bates (co-opted)

Janet Berry

John Bevan

Rachel Blake

Nick Bragger (co-opted)

John Cotton

Ed Derrick

Gerard Heffey (co-opted)

Ross Houston

Heather Johnson

Paul Martin

Amanda Pinnock

Sheila Spencer

Christopher Worrall (co-opted)

WHAT IS THE LABOUR HOUSING GROUP?

The Labour Housing Group is a lobbying group that is affiliated to the Labour Party and dedicated to the development of a socialist housing policy.

You can contact us at
<http://labourhousing.org/contact> and join us at
<https://labourhousing.org/membership/>

Individuals must be members of the Labour Party and agree to be bound by Labour Party rules and the LHG constitution.

£ APPEAL £ APPEAL £ APPEAL £ APPEAL £

If you cannot spare time and energy, you can still help us in our work by making a donation by bank transfer to:

"Labour Housing Group", Account number 50478080, Sort code 08-90-06,

Co-operative Bank, PO Box 1AN, Blandford Street, Newcastle, NE99 1AN.

Of course, you can also send a cheque made payable to "Labour Housing Group" c/o **The Treasurer, Flat 2, 8 Torrington Park, London N12 9SS**

PLEASE QUOTE "LHG2021 CAMPAIGN"

For readers new to housing policy issues, *Labour Housing Group* publishes a series of short guides aimed at a wide readership.

Our published **Briefings** on current topics include *Homelessness, Rough Sleeping, Affordable Housing, Private Renting Sector, Rural Housing and Leasehold Reform.*

The latest edition covers *Council Homes*.

They can be found at:
<https://labourhousing.org/resources/lhg-briefings/>

If you would like to contribute, please email our Policy Officer, Paul Martin at pauljmartin@clara.co.uk.

Opinions expressed here are not necessarily those of the Labour Housing Group.

