

The Social Housing White Paper

In November 2020 the Government published the ‘charter for social housing residents: social housing white paper’. This sets out the actions the Government will take to ensure that social housing customers are safe, are listened to, live in good quality homes, and put things right when things go wrong.

This is a very significant and important change within the housing sector and, along with other providers, Newlon are responding proactively to it, and because of this, we wanted to let you know more about it and its significance to you.

What is a ‘white paper’?

White papers are policy documents produced by the Government that set out their proposals for future legislation.

Because of their complexity, it can take a number of years before the proposals in a white paper become law. Sometimes they don’t.

Who does it affect?

The white paper is a charter for everyone living in social housing, so it has a positive impact on you as residents. The overarching themes include building and customer safety, and customer voice.

It will also affect Newlon as a business. We will have new regulations to follow and work is taking place to implement the requirements.

Why has this white paper been written?

The tragedy at Grenfell Tower in June 2017 raised critical questions for everyone involved in social housing, including residents, landlords, developers, and local and national government.

The government states it is committed to learning from the lessons of Grenfell. They have established an independent public inquiry and started implementing the recommendations of its phase one findings. Through the Building Safety Bill they are undertaking the most significant changes in building safety for a generation.

The government’s Green Paper in 2018 sought residents’ views in a ‘Call for Evidence’ on a wide range of potential changes, and they received over 1,000 responses. Many customers reported positive experiences, but others did not. They heard concerns about safety and quality; of complaints being handled slowly or poorly; and about residents feeling they were not listened to, or not treated with respect. The latest input, from the White Paper, will be panels drawn from 250 residents who will give

their input to government, and three Newlon residents have put themselves forward as potential members of those panels.

What does this white paper say?

- The white paper presents a charter setting out seven commitments that social housing residents should be able to expect from their landlord.
- It presents a range of different initiatives and legislative changes, building on proposals set out in the 2018 green paper and the review of the 'Call for Evidence'.
- The overarching themes are building and resident safety, and resident voice.

It also aims to deliver the improvements in transparency and accountability promised in the 2018 green paper.

- To ensure landlords comply with the charter, the white paper outlines plans for new regulation and a strengthened Housing Ombudsman. These plans will include regular inspections for landlords with more than 1,000 homes, regulation on consumer standards, removing the serious detriment test (which currently prevents the Regulator from intervening in cases unless it has reason to believe tenants are at risk of a 'serious detriment'), and new powers for the Ombudsman to issue complaint handling failure orders. Complaint handling failure orders ensure that a landlord's complaint handling process is accessible, consistent and enables the timely progression of complaints for residents.
- Social landlords will also have to report against new resident satisfaction and income/expenditure measures, with an expectation that residents should be able to access key information from their landlord.
- The paper proposes a potential review of the Decent Homes Standard (the minimum standards social homes are required to meet), new nominated responsible person(s) for health and safety and consumer standards, and an intention to tackle anti-social behaviour by clarifying the roles of different agencies.

The white paper seven commitments

1. To be safe in your home. We will work with industry and landlords to ensure every home is safe and secure.
2. To know how your landlord is performing, including reporting on repairs, complaints and safety, and how it spends its money, so you can hold it to account.
3. To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly, with access to a strong ombudsman who will give you swift and fair redress when needed.
4. To be treated with respect, backed by a strong consumer regulator and improved consumer standards for tenants.

5. To have your voice heard by your landlord, for example through regular meetings, scrutiny panels or being on its board. The government will provide access to help, if you want it, for you to learn new skills to ensure your landlord listens.
6. To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in, with your landlord keeping your home in good repair.
7. To be supported to take your first step to ownership, so it is a ladder to other opportunities, should your circumstances allow.