



## **Homes for Cathy response to the Consultation by the Regulator of Social Housing on the new Consumer Standards and Code of Practice – September 2023**

Homes for Cathy welcomes the provisions in the draft Standards and Code, including the retention of provisions in the Tenancy Standard which require housing associations to assist local authorities in their homelessness duties and to try to prevent evictions through tenancy sustainment support.

We welcome the reference to the needs of prospective tenants in the Allocations and Lettings section of the Standard but would urge that the definition of 'consumers' for the purposes of relevant sections of the Standard and Code should expressly include prospective tenants who may be in statutory or non-statutory temporary accommodation or rough sleeping. Prospective tenants should be included in the scope of the Transparency Influence and Accountability Standard as they already are in the Tenancy Standard.

We would like the Regulator to go further in signalling to registered providers the actions they should take to implement the homelessness related provisions of the Consumer Standard. This would help to create a more level playing field for housing associations in tackling homelessness by helping encourage all housing associations to adopt the practices of the best.

We believe this could be achieved through amendments to both the Standards and the draft Code of Practice as follows:

### **Proposed amendments to the Standards**

- **Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard:**
  - In Section 2.1 Diverse Needs, paragraph 2.1.1 should relate to prospective tenants as well as tenants, so that RPs are required to understand the diverse needs of prospective tenants and also to assess whether prospective tenants have fair access to services;
  - In section 2.4 Performance Information, require RPs to monitor the proportion of lettings that go to homeless households.
- **Tenancy Standard**
  - In Section 2.1, paragraph 2.1.1 RPs should also be required to work with local authorities to understand and remove the barriers that disadvantage some applicants with a background of homelessness in accessing social housing
  - In Section 2.2, in addition to preventing unnecessary evictions, RPs should be required to ensure that meaningful advice and assistance is available to

tenants at risk of losing their homes with support to enable tenants to access this and should be required work in partnership with local authorities and other relevant agencies to prevent evictions *into homelessness*.

- **Neighbourhood and Community Standard**
  - In Section 2.4.1 as well as having a policy for responding to domestic abuse, it should be a requirement that this clearly sets out how providers will support survivors of domestic abuse and monitor the effectiveness of policy implementation.
  - In Section 2.4.2 the term 'must co-operate' should be strengthened to something like 'must co-operate and engage effectively' with appropriate local authority departments etc.

### **Proposed amendments to Code of Practice**

- In the section of the code entitled '**Performance Information**' add the following paragraph:
  - In addition to monitoring, publishing and acting on their performance in relation to the TSMs, registered providers should review data gathered through CORE and the Statistical Data return relating to the requirement to assist local authorities to meeting their homelessness duties. This should include monitoring the proportion of lettings made to homeless households and the number and characteristics of tenants subject to eviction proceedings and the number evicted. RPs should benchmark their performance on these measures with other housing providers and in partnership with local authorities should take appropriate steps to prevent homelessness arising from evictions and remove the barriers that disadvantage some people with a background of homelessness from accessing social housing;
- Add the following line to paragraph 64 (Allocations and lettings):
  - Registered providers should engage effectively with local authorities to understand and remove the barriers that disadvantage some applicants with a background of homelessness in accessing social housing.
- Add the following to paragraph 70 (Tenancy sustainment and evictions):
  - RPs should engage effectively with local authorities and other relevant agencies to prevent evictions into homelessness.

Finally, the Code and Standard should recognise the particular requirements of people living in supported housing and seek clarity on how the regulation of RPs' implementation of the new Code and Standards will align with oversight in the forthcoming National Standards for Supported Housing being introduced by the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023.