

<b>Report to:</b>	<b>SHAREHOLDER COMMITTEE</b>
<b>Relevant Company Representative:</b>	John Donnellon, Chief Executive, Blackpool Coastal Housing Limited
<b>Relevant Cabinet Member:</b>	Cllr Ivan Taylor, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Partnerships and Performance
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	26 November 2021

**BLACKPOOL COASTAL HOUSING LIMITED: SOCIAL HOUSING WHITE PAPER UPDATE**

**1.0 Purpose of the report:**

1.1 To inform the Shareholder of the implications of the social housing white paper.

**2.0 Recommendation(s):**

2.1 To note the contents of the report and endorse the joint review and preparations being proposed by Blackpool Coastal Housing Limited (BCH) and the Housing team.

**3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):**

3.1 The white paper is intended to translate into primary legislation which will impact on the Council as the owner of social housing stock and BCH as the Councils agent delivering housing services that are in the scope of the white paper. It is important that Blackpool is able to demonstrate compliance with the intended legislation.

3.2 Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

3.3 Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council’s approved budget? Yes

**4.0 Other alternative options to be considered:**

4.1 None

**5.0 Council priority:**

- 5.1 The relevant Council priorities are:
- The economy: Maximising growth and opportunity across Blackpool.

- Communities: Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience.

## 6.0 Background information

6.1 The long awaited social housing white paper has been published, the full paper can be accessed by following this link,

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-charter-for-social-housing-residents-social-housing-white-paper/the-charter-for-social-housing-residents-social-housing-white-paper>

The paper does not contain many surprises in that much of the content has been led by the response to the Grenfell tragedy and has been rehearsed over the last twelve months by the various Housing ministers that have come and gone. A summary of the key points is listed below but it also worth noting that there are no new additional measures to stimulate the large scale development of new social housing and the emphasis is still towards a hierarchy of tenure with owner occupation still seen as the aspirational solution.

There is no clear timetable for delivery of the new legislation but the government has been clear in its intent by its action so far in beefing up the role of both the housing regulator and the ombudsman. Significant steps are being taken in advance of legislation to bring poor performance under scrutiny and to highlight publically examples of failures in service.

### KEY PRINCIPLES:

- To be safe in your home
- To know how your landlord is performing
- To have complaints dealt with promptly and fairly
- To be treated with respect
- To have your voice heard by your landlord
- To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in
- To be supported to take your first step to ownership

### MAIN PROPOSALS:

#### Safe in your home:

- Safety to be recognised by the consumer standard and a memorandum of understanding between the housing regulator and the Health and Safety Executive
- Every provider to have a senior nominated person responsible for health and safety
- Consultations on whether or not to make electrical testing and smoke and CO2 alarms compulsory in every property
- Joint work with the sector on developing the tenant voice

Is your landlord performing?

- Regulator to produce a standard set of satisfaction measures but no league tables at this stage
- A new access to information scheme (as an Arms-Length Management Organisation (ALMO), BCH already has the LA regulation)
- A clear breakdown of how income is spent
- A senior role with responsibility for the consumer standard

Swift and fair resolution to complaints:

- Quicker routes to the Ombudsman, no eight week wait before a referral and no requirement for the designated person review
- A beefed up Ombudsman role with extended powers
- Everyone required to have clear mechanisms for making a complaint
- Poor performers will be named and shamed

Transformed consumer regulation:

- Proactive monitoring of compliance with the consumer standard by the regulator
- Removal of the “serious detriment” test when looking at whether the standard has been breached
- A routine inspection of compliance with the standard every four years
- The regulator will have a widened scope to encompass safety and transparency and will have the power to issue a code of practice on consumer standards
- Strengthened enforcement powers for the regulator
- Local authorities and ALMOs to be brought into the scope of the regulator

Have your voice heard:

- Regulator to look at and disseminate best practice
- A new Opportunities and Empowerment Programme to support better engagement
- A review of professional training and development for customer service

A good quality home and neighbourhood:

- A review of the decent homes standard to include quality green spaces
- A focus on tackling anti-social behaviour
- A review of allocation methods to ensure fairness in outcomes

Supporting the first step to home ownership:

- Affordable housing grant weighted to shared ownership models

- Shared ownership to be made more accessible, lower thresholds for buying in and staircasing up. Landlords to be asked to cover the first 10 years of repairs in full.
- A new right to shared ownership for housing association tenants who live in grant funded homes
- A new design guide encompassing best practice
- A new affordable home guarantee scheme
- Encouragement to LAs and ALMOs to take advantage of the lifting of the debt cap to build more social homes.

BCH has already begun work to review compliance with the objectives of the white paper on the basis that none of the proposals are unexpected and for good landlords many of the measures talked about are in place which is the case with BCH. Greater oversight is already being seen from the regulator and Ombudsman. There is a differential impact on Housing Associations and local authority controlled stock with some of the measures. While the paper stops short of right to buy for housing associations the proposed changes to shared ownership will create some issues around viability and management while right to buy continues. There is some sense of missed opportunities in terms of a lack of funding and impetus to build more social housing and the tone of the introduction is disappointing and does little to remove the stigma associated with social housing that the government professed to want to change.

6.2 The Council via internal audit have made space to review the implications of the white paper and it is important that in reviewing compliance with the demands of the white paper that there is a shared approach to understanding the white paper and delivering any change between the Council as owner of the stock and BCH as its agent to deliver services. Blackpool has a strong foundation given its approach to company governance and oversight and good evidence of strong delivery but it will be important to be seen to be reviewing the Company's governance and delivery and that strengths can be demonstrated upon inspection.

6.3 Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

## **7.0 List of Appendices:**

7.1 None.

## **8.0 Financial considerations:**

8.1 None as a result of this report.

## **9.0 Legal considerations:**

9.1 Once new legislation is passed it will be binding on all social housing providers, in the interim there will be a greater focus on existing powers and how they can be used by both the

regulator and the ombudsman to take forward the principles of the white paper.

**10.0 Risk management considerations:**

10.1 Failure to prepare for the implications of the white paper and any subsequent legislation would leave the Council at risk of action from the regulator and the ombudsman should there be any failure to meet the required standards.

**11.0 Equalities considerations:**

11.1 None as a result of this report.

**12.0 Sustainability, climate change and environmental considerations:**

12.1 None as a result of this report.

**13.0 Internal/external consultation undertaken:**

13.1 None.

**14.0 Background papers:**

14.1 The Housing White Paper which can be accessed by following the link below.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-charter-for-social-housing-residents-social-housing-white-paper/the-charter-for-social-housing-residents-social-housing-white-paper>

**15.0 Key decision information:**

15.1 Is this a key decision? No

15.2 If so, Forward Plan reference number:

15.3 If a key decision, is the decision required in less than five days? No

15.4 If **yes**, please describe the reason for urgency:

N/A

**16.0 Call-in information:**

16.1 Are there any grounds for urgency, which would cause this decision to be exempt from the call-in process? No

16.2 If **yes**, please give reason:

N/A