

## Meeting on Social Housing

Thanks for the opportunity to attend the meeting on Social Housing organized by Shephard's Bush Housing Trust and the Ministry for Housing and Planning; it was interesting and informative. The session involved group discussions followed by a summary session and a close out speech from the Minister Alok Sharma.

This was the eighth of a total of twelve sessions held at various locations throughout the country with the intent of issuing a green paper next year.

Subsequent to the meeting the Department will forward to the individual attendees.

- a) A summary of all comments made at these sessions
- b) A copy of the green paper when produced for review and comment.

## General Comments

1. Almost all the attendees were representing what might be termed "classic" social housing i.e. council houses/housing estates and flats. Apart from myself I was not aware of anyone commenting from the perspective of hostel accommodation.
2. Predictably there was quite a lot of discussion about fire safety in tower blocks (Grenfall), and to be honest from my point of view subject to misinformed approaches. In particular ,and this is not to decry their efforts , that the solution should be left to the London Fire Brigade that is ,I would submit not the best approach as the brigade does not necessarily have the resources or expertise to undertake detailed fire and engineering analysis of such facilities.
3. A lot of discussion about money. The Government thinks it can get out of trouble by throwing money at the "problems" (or at least promising to do so) and residents think that money will solve all their problems. Of course adequate funding is essential but ,and this is my opinion, unless first the problems are properly defined, prioritized and managed this approach will result in dissipation of resources under the rule of various "committees" {remember that an old saying is that " a camel is was to be a horse but was designed by a committee")

## My main comments to the group and which were included in the group submission:

- On the question of fire/safety that the 2012 Building Regulations require extensive review to bring in line with international standards e.g. NFPA,ISO (Note that Judith Hackitt ex Head of the HSE is presently heading a review board on this and other associated requirements)
- That management of social housing, whatever type of housing, should be formally held accountable to residents for quality of service.
- That social housing and particularly in the hostel sector should provide places appropriate to the residents needs ,in particular spaces available for individuals suffering from mental illness.
- That money is not the only solution but that the use of the available resources be managed by professional project managers, as and I learned this in the discussion from persons in other types of housing this is not always the case. Some of the discussions on waste of funds,

outsourcing to contractors with inadequate control, again from my background, I would not tolerate appropriate contractor management is essential.

- Again and realizing that there are some certification processes in place, a national coordinated certification body not only for hostels but social housing generally (presently again from what I learned this is largely council /company or housing association dependant on what they do).

### **Overall Summary**

These were the overall summary points identified in the final session although it was stated that all comments would be rationalized and included in the overall submission.

1. The need for more social housing in particular considering young, disadvantaged or individuals with specific needs, mobility, mental health issues etc.
2. Enhanced community engagement in the provision of social housing.
3. Mechanisms to be in place to ensure that residents are listened to and those providers are held accountable to take action or otherwise respond to concerns (apparently the present general complaints procedures including the Ombudsman are inadequate and ineffective).
4. Establish a “National Tenant Voice” *{note I was unfamiliar with this proposal}*
5. Both government and society address the issue of stigma associated with social housing. (Apparently this is a country wide issue), the hostel “stigma” is I would suggest even more marked.
6. Improvements in the maintenance and repair process in terms of priority and time, and requires funding.
7. The problems associated with antisocial behavior in some areas which is a reflection of wider issues of education, jobs, youth culture etc.
8. The necessity to ensure that all social housing is physically safe for residents, particularly fire safety.

### **Ministers Comments**

Government committed to improvement and house building, interesting though after questioned did admit that social housing would not have such prominence if the tower block fire hadn't occurred.

Extra 2 billion in housing ....promised!

This engagement process would result in green paper next year.