

General Election 2024

Note 1 - Tpas policy priorities





Introduction

This document is the first of three briefing notes linked to the 2024 General Election. It highlights some potential components of a Tpas 'Ask' of the next government. We'll use these to guide our communication and other activities ahead of the election, and to shape our policy work when the new government is in place.

The components are grouped into four themes:

- Tenant voices
- Housing standards
- Tenants' rights
- Rents

In promoting these ideas, we need to frame them as concepts, rather than complete solutions. We're confident about the principles and the aims, but we're not the right group to develop the detail.

Also in this series:

- Note 2 - Priorities identified by key sector bodies
- Note 3 – what are the main parties' proposed housing policies

Where either sector bodies or political parties are promoting ideas that we can support, these have been highlighted in the documents.

Tenant voices

The proposed ideas would build on the new Consumer Regulation and on recent work by national organisations such as the Regulator and the Ombudsman. We can say that a satisfactory solution would need to include the following:

1. National Tenant Voice (possible options to consider):
 - Funded by 'levy' on every social housing rent
 - Hosted by Regulator, but independent
 - Drawn from existing panels, such as Housing Ombudsman Building Safety Regulator etc.
2. Tenants' Voice at LA level
 - Every housing authority to facilitate (and host) independent council-wide forum
 - Funded through HA/HRA levy
 - Drawn from each landlord's engagement/scrutiny structures
3. More specific requirements on Influence and Accountability
 - Every social landlord to have a tenant panel
 - Landlords to demonstrate influence and accountability



Housing standards

1. Finalise the updated Decent Homes Standard
 - Including energy efficiency
 - Set a deadline for landlord compliance. Landlords that miss the deadline should be unable to access grant for new homes and should be liable to severe penalties for missed deadline
2. Increase and streamline funding for retrofit of existing social housing, particularly for councils
3. Create a specialist team at Homes England to promote/advise and manage funding for social housing improvement and regeneration projects, as partners rather than simply a funding body
4. Require full transparency on investment plans for existing homes (not detailed costs, but timing, details of partners, specifications etc.)
5. Create a centrally-funded 'whistleblower-style' route for social housing tenants to get independent advice and advocacy on disrepair/poor standards. Prioritising resolving living conditions, rather than compensation/punishing landlords.

Tenants' rights

1. Restore access to Legal Aid and early advice for housing cases
 - Restore funding for law centres and ensure available in every LA area
 - Legal Aid to be available for disrepair and protection from eviction
 - Legal Aid for judicial review (challenging LA decisions)
 - Update the means test for Legal Aid in line with inflation
2. Reform Right to Buy
 - Allow councils to suspend RTB/ reduce discounts/ increase qualification period
 - End RTB for newbuild homes
 - Create new restrictions to prevent RTB homes entering the PRS (including buy-back option for councils)
 - Full value of receipts to be available for new social housing and/or regeneration schemes – no 'treasury share'
 - Councils should have full discretion over how to secure social housing (e.g. direct development, grant to HA, partnership with developer)
3. Right to Home Information
 - Tenants to have access to information about their home including Fire Risk Assessments, construction details etc.
4. Proactive central government support of Right to Manage, Right to Transfer etc, including capacity building and independent advice



Rents

Nevertheless, here are some possible proposals:

1. Headline rent settlement to be agreed at least 5 years in advance
2. Warm rents:
 - Discount for homes not meeting EPC C or above
 - Premium for A, B homes
 - 'typical' tenant would pay same in total for rent and energy, regardless of EPC rating
3. Restore rent convergence
 - Rents well below target rent to be increased by more than 'standard' increase until they reach target rent
 - Continue to freeze increases for rents above target
4. Recalculate Formula/Target rents to create new targets
 - The 1999 values and local incomes included in the Rent Formula are obsolete –some areas have boomed, while others have stood still
 - Revalue homes and recalculate incomes to reflect current picture
 - Implement a convergence approach (see above)