

LFHC Chairs Report 2016

Introduction

This year has been a momentous year with the Housing and Planning Bill dominating the Housing agenda. We held a number of successful forums during the year and we hope to hold more. The social housing sector has been attacked as never before and it is evident that the sector faces severe challenges for the future.

Housing and Planning Bill

LFHC joined with a number of different groups to fight the bill including the London Tenants Federation, Just Space and the Confederation of Cooperative Housing. We held a number of forums dealing with the Bill. In addition I chaired protest meetings in Islington and attended a number of different protest marches and events. The House of Lords were lobbied intensely and Lord Kerslake led the fight against the Bill in the Lords. The Lords were granted some concessions of a minor nature mostly. But the driving force behind the government's climb-down was the Office of National Statistics decision to include the £80 Billion of Housing Association Debt and part of the national debt.

The Bill has now passed royal assent. The original measures of the Bill remain mostly intact although slightly watered down. The measures such as fixed term tenancies, pay to stay for households in social Housing earning over £40,000 have been designated as 'voluntary' for Registered Providers but not for Councils.

Along with other specialist Housing Organisation Ownership Coops are being allowed to increase their rents by the rate of inflation plus £2 per week for the next year as a concession. But whether this will continue after a year is mute. I would urge our members whose rents are still below the target social housing rents for their area to take advantage of this now.

Many of the provisions of the Bill will require secondary legislation referred to by some people as the 58 Henry VIII decrees due to their fundamentally undemocratic nature. It is estimated that it will take six months for this secondary legislation to appear. So it looks like it will be December before we can get any measure of the effects of the Bill on our organisations.

Deregulation

Has the year progressed many Co-operatives are looking at the possibility of deregulation from the Homes and Communities Agency. In the past the Housing Corporation encouraged this as a way of getting rid of small bothersome Housing associations who were more trouble than they were worth. But that position has now changed and there seemed to be a marked reluctance by the HCA to release any organisation it regulated without the repayment of any Housing Corporation grant received by a Coop. In addition the Coop would have to show that it is a viable organisation and able to survive independently for the foreseeable future.

However one of the provisions of the Housing and planning Bill abolishes a registered provider's obligation to gain consent from the HCA when disposing of properties, replacing it with an obligation to notify the HCA of any disposals. In theory a housing Cooperative could dispose of its property to an unregistered Co-operative or build new properties which would be effectively outside the regulatory framework. The HCA is currently consulting on some of the secondary legislation around this issue.

Alleviating Fuel poverty amongst our membership

We also had some interesting discussions on how Housing Cooperatives could provide additional services to their members such as solar panels to cut electricity bills and insulation measures to cut gas bills so hence alleviate fuel poverty amongst their members. The energy Cooperative sector and the Housing Cooperative sector seem a match made in heaven.

The New London Mayor

The new London Mayor is more sympathetic to Housing Cooperatives and his deputy has connection with the Housing Cooperative movement. So there may be opportunities to work on this in the future,

Finally

Our Secretary has outlined our plans for the year ahead so I won't discuss them in details here.

Thanks to all the committee members for their hard work over the years.

A special thanks to Hillary Ellwood for her hard work in what has been a difficult year.

I would also like to thank two executive members who are stepping down this year Sue Philpott and Lorna Fleming for their work over the years and wish them well in their endeavours in the future.

And thanks to everybody who have participated in our activities over the year

Mick O'Sullivan LFHC Chair