



Championing better homes and communities

The Better Social Housing Review

NFA response in brief

September 2023

Introduction

The NHF and CIH set up an independent panel to tackle poor quality housing association homes which published its report in December 2022. The Better Social Housing Review (BSHR) is focused on housing associations only, however the NFA has recognised that the issues it seeks to tackle are also relevant to the wider social housing sector.

The NFA welcomes the BSHR report and its recommendations. We recommend that members review all seven recommendations, discuss them with tenants and their parent councils to agree which ones are relevant to them locally, report on how they are currently doing against each relevant recommendation and work to make improvements where necessary.

The NFA has also published an [action plan](#) of work that we will do, as a membership body, to support members seeking to review and report on the BSHR recommendations. We will focus on those areas that we believe will add value to members.

The NFA is specifically engaged with two strands of work that have emerged from the BSHR: the Knowing our Homes project led by the NHF which is responding to the first recommendation; and Rethinking Repairs, being led by the CIH, which is responding to the third recommendation.

Better Social Housing Review Recommendations:

1. Every housing association, and the sector as a whole, should refocus on their core purpose and deliver against it.
2. Housing associations should work together to conduct and publish a thorough audit of all social housing in England.
3. Housing associations should partner with tenants, contractors and frontline staff to develop and apply new standards defining what an excellent maintenance and repairs process looks like.

4. The Chartered Institute of Housing should promote the traditional “housing officer” role as a supported and valued employment opportunity with a Chartered Institute of Housing recognised programme of training and continuing development.
5. Housing associations should work with all tenants to ensure that they have a voice and influence at every level of decision making across the organisation, through both voluntary and paid roles.
6. Housing associations should develop a proactive local community presence through community hubs which foster greater multi-agency working.
7. Housing associations should support tenants and frontline staff to undertake an annual review of the progress each organisation is making in implementing this review’s recommendations.

Summary of the NFA response to the recommendations

1. Every housing association, and the sector as a whole, should refocus on their core purpose and deliver against it.

The NFA fully supports all ALMOs reviewing and refocusing (if necessary) on their core purpose and delivering against it. However, as housing management companies set up for the clear purpose of managing their parent councils housing stock, we do not believe that ALMOs have veered away from their core purpose in the way that some criticise certain housing associations for.

The NFA urges all ALMOs and parent councils to revisit their remit and ensure that sufficient focus and resource is placed on the core purpose of managing and maintaining council housing and providing excellent customer services to all tenants and that the HRA business plan and the ALMO management fee are resourced to deliver against that ambition.

The publication and checklists produced by the NFA and CWAG last year, [Excellence in Management and Partnership](#) should be very helpful in carrying out such a review.

2. Housing associations should work together to conduct and publish a thorough audit of all social housing in England.

The NFA fully supports the principle that every social housing organisation has an up-to-date stock condition survey and good, up to date housing management data systems so that they have a proper understanding of both the physical condition of their stock and who is living in their homes.

The NFA has been supporting ALMOs review their data management strategies, sharing good practice through officer networks and meetings as well as inviting experts to give presentations to the group.

We agree that more work can be done across the whole social housing sector to improve the quality of data currently being reported to both the Regulator of Social Housing and DLUHC and are engaged with the Knowing Our Homes project, led by the NHF to help that work in the council sector.

3. Housing associations should partner with tenants, contractors and frontline staff to develop and apply new standards defining what an excellent maintenance and repairs process looks like.

The NFA fully supports the idea that ALMOs work with tenants, their parent councils, contractors or DLOs and frontline staff to review current standards and working practices in the repairs service. We believe this is a good area for tenant scrutiny where it hasn't been done recently and our new publication [Critical Friends](#) should be of use to ALMOs and councils considering this approach in the next year or so.

The NFA is committed to work with the CIH on this recommendation to share good practice and help overcome sector wide challenges in delivering good repairs services to tenants.

4. The Chartered Institute of Housing should promote the traditional “housing officer” role as a supported and valued employment opportunity with a Chartered Institute of Housing recognised programme of training and continuing development.

The NFA welcomes this recommendation as well as the government's requirements to ensure all senior housing executives gain a level 5 diploma in housing and all senior housing managers, a level 4.

The NFA will continue to support our Housing Management group, providing regular opportunities to network, raise questions, discuss challenges and solutions and share best practice.

The NFA would also like to work with the CIH to ensure the voice of ALMOs, experts in housing management, are fed into this work and help to produce useful and valued training for social housing organisations to use.

5. Housing associations should work with all tenants to ensure that they have a voice and influence at every level of decision making across the organisation, through both voluntary and paid roles.

The NFA fully supports this recommendation. ALMOs have tenant engagement built into the model with tenants on the board of most ALMOs and tenant scrutiny panels or other tenant groups feeding directly into board.

[Every Voice Counts](#) summarises the work across the ALMO sector on tenant engagement and provides some good practice examples for ALMOs to review and our recently published [Critical Friends](#) publication on the role of tenant scrutiny panels outlines the principles we believe all ALMOs should seek to embody within their tenant scrutiny models.

The NFA will continue to support its own Tenant Advisory Panel, supporting them in setting their agendas and inviting speakers on issues important to them as well as consulting them on our business plan priorities and projects as they develop. We will also continue to support our tenant engagement officers forum, providing regular opportunities to network, share best practice and raise questions and issues for discussion.

6. Housing associations should develop a proactive local community presence through community hubs which foster greater multi-agency working.

The NFA fully supports the idea that all social housing organisations should have a proactive local presence. As all ALMOs work within one local authority area it should be relatively easy for ALMOs to show they already do. However, as ALMOs and councils have sought to make efficiency savings and tenants have switched from visiting local housing offices to contacting their ALMOs via websites, apps and the telephone there has sometimes been a reduction in the local community presence which the pandemic and reoccurring lockdowns reinforced.

We know that coming out of the pandemic many ALMOs are reviewing their staff working arrangements and making use of local hubs again for agile working. We would urge all ALMOs to properly review their local community presence in terms of officers out and about on any given day, and the use of local hubs for officers and tenants to visit and make use of. We would also urge a review of partnership working with other local stakeholders such as health colleagues which were often strengthened during the pandemic but may be losing energy again.

7. Housing associations should support tenants and frontline staff to undertake an annual review of the progress each organisation is making in implementing this review's recommendations.

The NFA supports this recommendation and urges ALMOs to consider their individual responses to these recommendations, discuss them with their tenants and boards to develop local action plans where relevant which will be monitored regularly to check on progress.