

# Understanding Social Housing



Training information pack

choosing change 

This information pack has been produced by Roger Saunders, from Choosing Change:

E: [roger@choosingchange.org.uk](mailto:roger@choosingchange.org.uk)

T: 01373 453 339

M: 07910 838 452

W: [www.choosingchange.org.uk](http://www.choosingchange.org.uk)

**Choosing Change** is an independent organisation aiming to support anyone engaged in social, community and organisational change. We offer a wide range of training courses designed for residents' and community groups, and for people working with communities.

VAHT/5/16

# What is 'social housing'?

The term *social housing* refers to housing provided and managed by local authorities (usually called *council housing*) and by housing associations and other organisations regulated by government (officially called *registered providers of social housing*). The key characteristic of social housing providers is that they do not exist to make a profit for their owners in the way that a company in the private sector would aim to do.

Social housing organisations generally provide accommodation, at affordable rents, to people who would find it difficult to obtain appropriate housing from private landlords or through home ownership. In most of the UK, the demand for homes in the social housing sector is greater than the number of homes available. To deal with this, social housing organisations must have clear criteria by which to decide who is eligible for their housing and who is not.

## A brief history of social housing

Until 1919 there was very little social housing in the UK. 90% of the population lived in private rented accommodation. People who could not afford the rents demanded by private landlords for decent housing were forced to rent sub-standard, slum housing and/or live in cramped, overcrowded conditions. However, some charitable trusts were set up by philanthropists such as Peabody and Guinness to provide decent rented accommodation.

After the First World War, the government encouraged councils to build new homes, offering them significant subsidies. In the 1930s, this policy was extended to 'slum clearance', with councils demolishing over a quarter of a million homes and offering their occupants new council homes.

The Second World War resulted in serious housing shortages, and the government again subsidised a wave of new home building, largely by councils. Many of the new estates were now developed in inner cities, instead of on the edge of towns. During the 1950s and '60s, government subsidies for social housing were gradually reduced. Councils were encouraged to build 'high-density' estates, including high-rise and medium-rise blocks of flats, and to keep costs down by using 'system-building'<sup>1</sup> methods.

In the 1960s, housing associations emerged as alternative providers of social housing. The government started to provide them with significant public

---

<sup>1</sup> *System building* involves producing building components in factories and then assembling them on site. This reduces the need for skilled labour in the construction process.

funding, and in 1964 set up the Housing Corporation to regulate and finance them.

The Labour government of 1964 initiated a further wave of council house building, and new minimum space standards were introduced<sup>2</sup>.

Housing policy under Conservative governments from 1979 to 1997 encouraged home ownership, and the Right to Buy allowed council tenants to buy their homes at a discount. The 1980s also saw the first 'large scale voluntary transfers', with local authorities transferring their housing to new housing associations they had set up themselves. Tenants became increasingly organised since the 1970s, campaigning against rent increases and for better services, and playing a growing role in decision-making.

Stock transfer continued after the Labour government came to power in 1997, and housing associations are expected to overtake local authorities as the main providers of social housing. The building of new social homes has slowed down since the early 1980s, and is now carried out only by housing associations.

In 2000 the government set a target that by 2010 all social homes must meet a Decent Homes Standard.

This brief history shows how the development of social housing has been driven by the changing policies of central government, which in turn have been strongly influenced by changing economic conditions.

## Who owns our housing?

The 4 main ways that housing in the UK is owned are:

- Owner occupation – where people have bought their own homes to live in
- Private renting – where the private owner of a home rents it out to tenants
- Housing associations
- Local authorities.

Until recent years, many housing associations focused on providing *special needs housing* – e.g. for elderly people, people with disabilities, women fleeing domestic violence etc. – while local authorities provided more *general needs housing*. As a result of stock transfer, housing associations now provide more general needs housing than councils.

---

<sup>2</sup> The new space standards were a result of the *Parker Morris* report.

The following table shows the extent of households living in each tenure in England, in 2006 and in 2014.

	England 2006	England 2014
Owner occupation	15,442,000 (70.2%)	14,319,000 (63.3%)
Private rented	2,611,000 (11.9%)	4,377,000 (19.4%)
Housing association	1,850,000 (8.4%)	2,279,000 (10.0%)
Local authority	2,086,000 (9.4%)	1,641,000 (7.3%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>21,989,000</b>	<b>22,617,000</b>

In 1979 social homes accounted for 31% of all English housing. Although social housing now has a much smaller proportion of the total, due largely to the Right to Buy, it is still a very important form of housing.

### How is the picture changing?

These are some of the most important trends in social housing:

- Local authorities are taking on a more *strategic* role; that is, they are doing more to analyse overall housing needs, issues and opportunities in their areas, and to plan what needs doing. But they are playing a smaller role in the actual *provision* of homes and housing services. This is sometimes referred to as local authorities' *enabling* role. In the UK, local authority stock fell from 6.57 million in 1981 to 2.7 million in 2006.
- In many areas, housing associations have replaced local authorities as the main providers of social housing, and this trend looks set to continue. Some housing associations have become very big, and many have joined together in consortia.
- As owner occupation continues to grow, social housing is becoming more of a 'housing of last resort' – and this at a time when, in the UK, the gap between the richest and poorest in society is widening. In 2001, the average weekly income of households in owner occupation was £600, whereas the average for council tenants was £208 and for housing association tenants £216. In 2013/14, 56% of households in the social housing sector had no-one in paid employment.
- The number of separate households needed is increasing, as the average size of households gets smaller. For example, the proportion of the UK population living in single person households increased from 14% in 1961 to 28% in 2014. 41% of households in the social housing sector are single person.

- Property prices and land values have been growing and the demand for housing increasing. At the same time, housebuilding has been slow and the political appetite for funding social housing is weak (compared with periods in the past). As a result, there has been a fairly dramatic growth in the private renting.

## Finance for social housing

There are 2 ways in which the money is spent on social housing:

### Capital investment

This pays for

- building new homes
- rehabilitating (major repairs and improvements to) existing homes.

### Revenue finance

This pays for

- managing properties
- repairs and maintenance
- financing borrowing (repaying loans and paying the interest on them).

Registered providers and local authorities acquire finance for capital investment by bidding to government grant programmes (such as the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA)'s Affordable Homes Programme 2015-18), by borrowing money from private investors<sup>3</sup>, by selling assets (homes, buildings, land) and by entering into agreements with developers.<sup>4</sup>

Most revenue finance comes from the rents that tenants pay.

In housing associations, the revenue account is known as the *Income and Expenditure Account*. Housing associations are restricted by regulators as to the rents they can set. When applying for capital funding, social housing providers are expected to show that the rent levels in the proposed housing scheme come within set guidelines. The government has aimed to harmonise the rents charged by housing associations and local authorities through a system known as *rent restructuring*.

Housing associations are encouraged to maintain surpluses (called reserves) to pay for any unforeseen events, and to maintain a *major repairs fund* (from revenue) to pay for all future major capital replacement works.

---

<sup>3</sup> The government has offered 'loan guarantees', intended to encourage investment by protecting investors from risk (for up to 30 years).

<sup>4</sup> These are known as 'Section 106 Planning Agreements', whereby housebuilders are given permission to build by local authorities, and cross-subsidise the profit they make on their 'market' properties to build 'affordable' homes.

Government subsidy for social housing has reduced enormously over the past two decades – by 67.4% between 1980/1 and 2001/2<sup>5</sup>. There has also been a big shift away from subsidising capital programmes towards subsidising individual households' rents, through housing benefits.

## Decision-making in social housing organisations

It is important that responsibilities within social housing organisations are structured in such a way that decisions are taken at the right level. **The government regulator** sets the broad framework within which all registered providers must operate. Each provider's **governing body** is responsible for the overall strategy, policies and performance framework of the organisation. The **chief executive or housing director** is responsible for overall leadership in line with the governing body's wishes and, with the **senior management team**, for ensuring operational performance is efficient and effective. **Staff** are responsible for delivering services in line with the organisation's standards. **Tenants** are customers, and also have the right to join panels to scrutinise the organisation's performance.

It is essential, then, to get **governance** right, since everything else should flow from the governing body's work. The governing body in a housing association is the **Board**. In a local authority it is the **councillors** who are responsible, operating either through a **Cabinet** system (usually with a Housing portfolio-holder) or a **Housing Committee** (if the Council have adopted a committee system).

**The key roles of a Board<sup>6</sup>** are:

- guarding the purpose of the organisation
- setting strategic direction, plans and objectives
- setting high standards of conduct and probity
- setting the delegation framework
- taking key decisions
- financial control and managing risk
- scrutinising performance and holding the executive to account
- appointing and remunerating the chief executive
- ensuring accountability.

---

<sup>5</sup> According to *Wilcox, S. (2002) – Housing Review 2002/3 for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation*

<sup>6</sup> These roles are taken from 'Leadership and Control: A governance manual for board members', 2011 edition, published by the National Housing Federation.

# Housing management

There is much more to social housing than simply *providing* homes. The social landlord has to *manage* the housing as well. There has been a good deal of debate as to what housing management should consist of, and a lot of changes over the past 25 years. In general there has been a move towards treating tenants less paternalistically and more like 'customers', with individual choices.

The core housing management tasks are:

- letting homes
- collecting the rent
- maintaining the properties in good condition
- managing tenancies and the environment in which tenants live.

Whereas in the past some of these tasks were 'specialised' (e.g. rent officers), most of them are now carried out by housing managers with 'generic' skills (i.e. they are responsible for a wide range of tasks). In addition to the core tasks, housing managers must spend time on such matters as

- planning and overseeing capital programmes
- supporting tenant participation
- dealing with Right to Buy
- encouraging energy efficiency
- liaising with other agencies to support wider regeneration
- encouraging equality and diversity in service provision and community life
- supporting community safety strategies.

Some of the main trends in housing management are:

- 'choice-based lettings' – helping home-seekers in their search for a new home, instead of allocating properties in a rigid way;
- focusing more on 'cyclical' (also known as 'planned') maintenance, and less on just carrying out repairs when things go wrong ('responsive maintenance');
- becoming more proactive in dealing with neighbour disputes and anti-social behaviour;
- enabling tenant participation in decisions about how services should be organised and improved.

## The Decent Homes Standard

In 2000 the government set a standard that, by 2010, all social homes must meet 'minimum standards of decency'. The target was later extended to include some homes in the private sector. In fact 92% of social housing met the standard by the end of 2010, with 2.1 million homes owned by local



authorities and housing associations still needing work to bring them up to the standard.

A 'decent home' is one which meets the following four criteria<sup>7</sup>:

**a) Meets the current statutory minimum standard for housing<sup>8</sup>**

**b) Is in a reasonable state of repair**

- that is, key building components such as external walls, roof, windows and doors, central heating boilers, gas fires, plumbing, electrics etc., are not in need of replacement.

**c) Has reasonably modern facilities and services:**

- A kitchen less than 20 years old
- A kitchen with adequate space and layout
- A bathroom less than 30 years old
- Appropriately located bathroom and WC
- Adequate noise insulation
- Adequate size and layout of common areas for blocks of flats.

**d) Provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort** through effective insulation and efficient heating.

## How social housing is regulated

### Introduction

Social housing in England is currently regulated<sup>9</sup> by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). As regulator, the HCA's role is to make sure social landlords are carrying out their statutory duties and responsibilities, and that they are providing services to an acceptable standard. It does this by setting out its expectations of social landlords, checking that they are meeting these expectations, working with landlords and tenants to address problems, and generally promoting good practice.

---

<sup>7</sup> For more information, see 'A Decent Home: Definition and guidance for implementation', published by the Department for Communities and Local Government (June 2006) - <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/pdf/138355.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> A home fails to meet this standard if it contains one or more hazards assessed as 'serious' under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)

<sup>9</sup> The Homes and Communities Agency took over the role of regulator from the Tenant Services Authority (TSA), as from April 2012.

## How does regulation work?

The current regulatory set-up was introduced in 2008 and is very different than the one it replaced<sup>10</sup>:

The HCA is the regulator for **all social landlords**. Previously local authorities and housing associations had separate regulators.

Instead of interfering with providers in a heavy-handed and demanding way, the HCA prefers an approach it calls '**co-regulation**'. This means that boards and councillors who govern providers' service delivery must take responsibility for ensuring their organisations are meeting the regulator's standards. In return for this reduction in external interference, the regulator expects social landlords to be **transparent** about their performance and to develop new, effective ways of being **accountable** to tenants.

The HCA places a great deal of emphasis on **tenant involvement and empowerment**. It wants tenants to play a major role in scrutinising and inspecting the services of their landlord, instead of relying upon outside inspectors.

It wants to let social landlords and tenants have a lot of **flexibility about the way services should be delivered locally**. By cutting back on red tape and rigid rules, the regulator is encouraging providers to innovate and to tailor local services to local needs, priorities and opportunities.

The regulator will adopt a **risk-based approach to intervention**. Unlike its predecessors, it will only intervene when it has clear evidence that there are serious problems and it thinks the social landlord may need help to put things right (see under *Reforms to Social Housing* below).

**The regulator has established standards** which it expects social landlords to meet. The standards cover 7 areas:

<b>Standard:</b>	<b>Covers:</b>
Tenant involvement and empowerment	Customer service, choice and complaints Involvement and empowerment Understanding and responding to the diverse needs of tenants
Home	Quality of accommodation Repairs and maintenance

<sup>10</sup> See *A guide to regulation of registered providers* - Homes & Communities Agency (14 May 2015)

Tenancy	Allocations and mutual exchange Tenure
Neighbourhood and community	Neighbourhood management Local area co-operation Anti-social behaviour
Rent	
Value for money	
Governance and financial viability	

These standards are each defined as **outcomes**. In other words, the regulator is not telling social landlords in a detailed way how they should go about providing particular services (e.g. collecting the rents or keeping estates clean). Instead it is outlining broad principles and results of services.

*Example of an outcome:*

'Registered providers shall work in partnership with other agencies to prevent and tackle anti-social behaviour in the neighbourhoods where they own homes.'

However, the regulator does spell out specific **expectations** in some areas.

*Example of an expectation:*

'Registered providers shall demonstrate that all tenants are made aware of their responsibilities and rights in relation to anti-social behaviour...'

## Local offers and annual reports

The regulator sees these standards as establishing the **framework** within which social landlords will organise, monitor and evaluate their performance, in co-operation with residents. Providers are expected to use the standards to develop a '**local offer**'. In other words, they should spell out what they will commit to do locally in order to meet the obligations of each standard.

Each year, providers should produce annual reports (by 1<sup>st</sup> October), explaining how effectively they met the standards, including their local offers, in the previous year (to 31<sup>st</sup> March)<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> HouseMark have produced a toolkit about the annual report to tenants, which can be downloaded from their website.

# Reforms to Social Housing

Most of the following reforms to social housing have been introduced through the Localism Act 2011. Their implementation has in many cases been reinforced by the publication of government guidance.

## Regulation

Whereas in the past social housing was regulated quite strictly by central government – through national standards and targets, collection of detailed performance information, an inspection regime, etc. – the regulatory system is now intended to allow much greater ‘local’ initiative. The government has introduced what it calls ‘**co-regulation**’ – social landlords and tenants working together to make sure housing services are being delivered effectively and appropriately.

While the government regulator (now the Homes and Communities Agency) still sets some **national standards**, these are defined in broad, general terms – although each standard is backed up by specific ‘expectations’. Social landlords are expected to work with tenants to define more detailed local standards and targets (the ‘**local offer**’), and to set up mechanisms by which tenants can **scrutinise** how effectively services are being delivered in practice.

The government regulator will only intervene if the landlord is failing in respect of the ‘**economic**’ standards (e.g. risks of bankruptcy, dangerous levels of debt, poor financial management etc.). For failures in respect of the ‘consumer’ standards, the government regulator will only intervene if there is a risk of **serious harm** to tenants or prospective tenants.

## Complaints

Whereas in the past there were separate Ombudsmen for housing association and local authority tenants, there is now **one Housing Ombudsman for all social housing**.

To encourage local democracy, the government has introduced a ‘democratic filter’. If a tenant wants to make a complaint, they should first use the social landlord’s own complaints system (stage 1). If the tenant is dissatisfied with the outcome of this process, they should then refer their complaint to their MP, a local authority councillor, or a tenant panel (stage 2). If they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of this process, they can then take the complaint to the Ombudsman (stage 3). (If a tenant does not want to use the democratic filter, they must wait 8 weeks after stage 1 before going to the Ombudsman.)

## Tenant Panels

All social landlords are required to have 'tenant panels'. This does not have to be a *new* body – it might be an existing tenant involvement structure, if such a one exists.

The role of tenant panels<sup>12</sup> might be to

- **make decisions** within the housing organisation – for example, on policies and procedures
- **shape services** – for example by setting standards and targets
- **monitor and scrutinise** the way services are delivered, or
- deal with **complaints** – for example, as part of the 'democratic filter'.

## Tenure

In the past, most people living in social housing received lifetime tenancies - 'secure tenancies' for council tenants and 'assured tenancies' for housing association tenants .

Social landlords now have the right to grant **fixed term tenancies**, normally for periods of at least five years. The aim is to enable landlords to manage their housing stock more effectively and fairly, encouraging people to move to another form of tenure (owner occupation or private landlord) if and when their circumstances change. Fixed term tenancies are only available for *new* tenants (i.e. *existing secure* tenants retained their lifetime tenancies).

## Rents

Social landlords have been enabled and encouraged by government to charge rents of up to 80% of 'market rent' (i.e. the rent that would be charged in the private sector locally for the particular type of accommodation), known as '**affordable rents**'. Most newly built social homes will be charged at affordable rents. Social landlords are also able to agree with the Homes and Communities Agency to convert a proportion of their re-lets to affordable rents.

## Allocations

In the past *anyone* could apply to live in social housing and go on a waiting-list, whether or not they stood any realistic chance of being offered accommodation. The Localism Act 2011 gave local authorities greater **freedom to decide who should qualify to go on the waiting-list** for housing in their areas.

---

<sup>12</sup> A guide – '*Tenant Panels: Options for Accountability*' – has been produced by the National Tenant Organisations, with support from the government.

The government still specifies which groups should be given 'reasonable preference' in relation to other qualifying applicants. Reasonable preference should, for example, be given to members of the armed forces and their families, people who are homeless, living in insanitary or overcrowded housing, or who need to move on medical or welfare grounds. However, local authorities can decide how to balance and weight different needs, and can add preferences that are important locally – for example, to recognise the importance of a 'local connection'<sup>13</sup>.

In addition, existing tenants seeking transfers will no longer have to compete with new applicants through the local authority's allocation scheme. The aim is to make it **easier for tenants to transfer**, thereby freeing up larger family homes.

### **Homelessness**

Local authorities have a duty to house people defined under the law as homeless. In the past homeless people could refuse offers of accommodation until they were offered secure accommodation in social housing. Local authorities are now able to discharge their duty to the homeless by offering suitable accommodation in the private sector.

### **Self-financing for Council housing**

In the past Councils who had retained their own housing had to pass to central government all the money they collected in rents. The government then paid to local authorities a sum for the management and maintenance of their housing.

In April 2012 this system changed and was replaced by 'self-financing' for council housing. **Councils were able to keep all their rents** and adopt long term strategies to manage and expand their stock using spare borrowing capacity and any surpluses. Around £28bn of housing debt was transferred to stock owning local authorities and limits were imposed on the amount councils could borrow against their housing assets.

The new system is forecast over the next 30 years to give councils control over £300bn of rental income and surplus rental streams that can support significant levels of new build. According to the Local Government Association, under current debt caps stock retaining councils could, collectively, borrow around £3bn to build 15,000 new homes over the next 5 years (or as many as 60,000 without the cap).

---

<sup>13</sup> The Department for Communities and Local Government have encouraged this use of a 'residency requirement' – a criterion whereby the applicant (or member of the applicant's household) must have lived within the authority's district for a specified period of time (e.g. minimum 2 years) in order to qualify for social housing. See *Providing social housing for local people – Statutory guidance* – DCLG, December 2013

The reforms were also intended to increase local transparency and accountability; improve management, maintenance and repairs; and encourage partnership working with housing providers.

### **Right to Buy for Housing Association tenants**

After the government indicated its desire to extend the Right to Buy (RTB) to housing association tenants (the RTB had previously applied only to council tenants), the National Housing Federation put an offer to government in September 2015 to implement the extended RTB on a voluntary basis. The offer was accepted, and the extended RTB is now being piloted in the housing association sector.

# Ways of involving residents

## Levels of involvement

Residents can have varying degrees of involvement in their housing services.

- At the very least, it is important that residents are **informed** – e.g. about what services to expect, or about the landlord’s plans for the future. Without information, other types of involvement are not possible.
- Whereas information-giving is a one-way process, being **consulted** is a two-way communication in which the landlord explains what the issues are and seeks residents’ feedback and views about them. However, consultation does not carry any guarantees that the landlord will take residents’ views into account when reaching decisions.
- Many social landlords have developed ways in which residents can actively **participate** in decisions about issues which affect them. This means establishing structures whereby the landlord and residents can share information and ideas and work in partnership.
- At the ‘most involved’ end of the scale, tenants can take **control** of services themselves, through the delegation of responsibility, and budgets, from landlord to representative tenants’ organisations.

## Structures for involvement

Different types of involvement need different types of ‘structure’ or organisation to make them happen. The following are examples of the structures which have been used by some social housing organisations.

### Enabling information-sharing and consultation

Steering Group	<i>An informal group set up to develop a tenant and resident organisation, or to ‘steer’ a particular project or initiative</i>
Tenant / Resident Panel	<i>A group drawn from all sections of the community, usually working to agreed ‘terms of reference’ but without formal authority – acts as a ‘sounding board’</i>
‘Street Voices’	<i>A system in which one individual in each street agrees to act as a ‘link’ or contact-point between residents and the landlord. Can also be used in blocks of flats.</i>
Tenants & Residents Association (and	<i>A formal group, with a constitution, committee and officers. If recognised by the landlord, TRAs can</i>



Federation)	<i>have considerable influence. In some areas, TRAs have formed Federations, to have more collective influence.</i>
Community Association	<i>Similar to a Tenants &amp; Residents Association, but with a focus wider or than housing. Many community associations concentrate on self-help activities at a grass roots level.</i>
Special interest groups	<i>In many communities, groups of residents get together to take action on a voluntary basis in order to support 'special interests' – e.g. the needs of a particular section of the community (young people, senior citizens, a faith community etc.).</i>
Focus groups	<i>Groups set up by the landlord or service-provider, usually as a one-off, in order to provide feedback and ideas on a particular issue.</i>
Mystery customers	<i>Many social landlords test their services by running 'mystery shopping' exercises. Residents are trained to approach housing staff, in housing offices or over the phone, and to record how staff deal with their enquiries. The results are used to help evaluate the quality of customer service.</i>

### **Enabling participation**

Neighbourhood / Estate Forum	<i>A partnership group involving residents, the landlord and, in many instances, other local organisations and service providers. Are set up at the neighbourhood or estate level, with the express purpose of addressing very local needs.</i>
Area / District Forum	<i>Like a Neighbourhood Forum, but focused on a wider area. Area Forums offer residents in a particular area the opportunity of influencing local services through regular meetings with area officers and possibly board members. Area Forums often reflect the boundaries of the social landlord's Area Offices.</i>
Scrutiny Panel or Committee	<i>A panel set up to consider housing strategies, policies and performance at an organisational level. The committee may also have a say in the setting of performance targets. Though many scrutiny panels are given considerable authority, they normally make recommendations (rather than decisions), and these are relayed to the Board.</i>
Special interest Forum	<i>A body dealing with the needs and concerns of a specific group, such as young people, black and minority ethnic people etc., and representing their interests. May have formal decision-making – or at least 'recommending' - powers.</i>

Multi-landlord Forum	<i>A partnership group involving tenants and residents of more than one landlord together with representatives of each landlord concerned. Particularly useful in areas where a number of social landlords manage housing.</i>
Neighbourhood / Estate Agreement	<i>Formal agreements between tenants / residents and service-providers, defining the levels of service residents can expect. These agreements can be 'single service' (e.g. between the landlord(s) and tenants/residents) or can incorporate commitments from a wide range of services. Neighbourhood Agreements are written following an assessment of local priorities, so that they reflect the particular needs of the community.</i>
Contract Boards	<i>These are established to monitor particular contracts – e.g. for repairs or cleaning – and enable tenants/residents to have direct influence over detailed aspects of service provision. Contract Boards can be involved in specifying and tendering contracts, selecting contractors, and monitoring their performance.</i>
Tenant/Resident Inspectors and Auditors	<i>Social landlords are required to monitor the performance of their services and report on them to tenants. It is good practice to involve tenant and resident representatives as inspectors in these reviews, helping gather evidence, assess performance, and recommend improvements.</i>

### **Enabling control**

Devolved Management Agreements	<i>Landlords have the power to devolve management arrangements for particular areas to boards or committees, with responsibilities specified in a management agreement.</i>
Tenant Management Organisations	<i>Council tenants have a legal right, known as the Right to Manage, to form Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs) that take responsibility for delivering specified housing services. Many housing association tenants also manage their own housing through TMOs.</i>
Tenants on the Board	<i>In many housing associations and Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs) there are tenant representatives on the Board of Management. The Board has overall responsibility for the direction, management and finance of the social landlord.</i>

# JARGON GUIDE

Affordable rent	A type of tenancy which social landlords can offer new tenants, in which rents will be set at a level higher than most equivalent social homes and closer to market rents.
Affordable Homes Programme	The government programme, administered by the Homes and Communities Agency, which subsidises the supply of new affordable homes by registered providers.
Allocations	The processes used to decide which applicants should be offered housing. (Also known as lettings or re-housing.)
Annual Lettings Plan	A plan drawn up by a social landlord that covers the various groups in need of housing that the landlord intends to let properties to over the year.
Arrears	Rent owed to the landlord by the tenant.
Assets	Things that belong to a housing landlord and that can be expressed in money terms. 'Fixed assets', such as properties, cannot be turned easily into cash. 'Current assets' include cash and bank balances, and things that can be turned fairly easily into cash, such as debts.
Assured tenancy	The form of tenancy (since 1989) for new housing association tenants. Although assured tenancies carry fewer statutory rights than the 'secure tenancies' of council tenants, housing associations are expected to incorporate most of these rights in tenancy agreements.
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic (people and communities). The term used to describe minority groups recognised as falling under the Race Relations Act 1976.
Capital expenditure	The cost of providing new homes or carrying out major repairs to existing ones. The term refers to investment in permanent assets such as land, buildings, and roads. It contrasts with 'revenue expenditure', which is regular, year on year spending on ongoing services such as housing management and day to day repairs.
Choice-Based Lettings	An approach to letting social housing in which applicants can 'bid' for the properties they want and for which they are eligible.
Citizens Jury	A method of consultation which uses a small cross-section of the community to look in depth at an issue, and make recommendations for change.

Co-regulation	Instead of the government-appointed housing regulator policing social housing in a top-down way, co-regulation means that the social landlord's governing body works with tenants to carry out much of the regulation, within broad standards set by the regulator.
CRE	Commission for Racial Equality
Decent Homes Standard	The government set a target that by 2010 all social housing, and some categories of private sector housing, had to meet certain 'minimum standards of decency'.
Difficult to let	A term used to describe housing that is unpopular with housing applicants for a variety of reasons.
Dispersed housing / projects	Social housing or supported housing where the individual houses, flats or schemes are scattered across a wide area, mixed with other types of housing.
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions – government department responsible for employment, pensions, child welfare, disability and health & safety.
Fair Rents	Rents set by an independent valuer and regulated by an independent tribunal. A rent that has been registered with the Rent Officer.
Foyer	Accommodation for young homeless people, which also play a role in helping their residents to access training, education and employment, and to gain independent living skills.
Governance	The system by which organisations are directed and controlled. In Housing Associations, the Board of Management is at the centre of the organisation's governance.
Homes and Communities Agency	The national housing and regeneration delivery agency for England – directs funding for new affordable homes and regulates all social housing
Housing Association	A non profit making body, managed by a voluntary board, formed to provide housing.
Housing Benefit	A means tested welfare benefit administered by local government that helps eligible tenants meet the cost of their rents.
Housing Ombudsman Service	Government-appointed body investigating complaints made about social landlords (local authorities <i>and</i> housing associations and other registered providers).
Housing Plus	Activities carried out by housing organisations to support communities and neighbourhoods that go beyond just the 'bricks and mortar – for example, developing social networks and the local economy.
Income and Expenditure Account	The account used by housing associations to manage their revenue income (mainly rents) and spending.

Introductory Tenancies	Tenancies for new tenants that last 1 year and then change to secure or assured tenancies if the tenant has not broken the terms of the agreement.
Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	A measure of a specific element of service (e.g. average time taken to re-let properties), used to report on and evaluate a service.
Landlord	The organisation which owns the property, issues the tenancy or licence agreement, and usually provides the housing management and maintenance service.
Leaseholder	A person who does not own the land their home is built on and so pays a ground rent for a fixed number of years. Tenants who live in flats and buy them from their landlord are called leaseholders.
Letting	The processes involved in renting a property to an applicant who has been allocated a tenancy.
LSVT	Large Scale Voluntary Transfer. The term used to describe the transfer of the whole (or most) or a local authority's stock to another social landlord.
Major Repairs	Big and costly items of maintenance, such as replacement of outworn components (e.g. windows) or structural elements.
Mystery Shopping	A way of monitoring service delivery. Individuals are trained to pose as customers (in person, by phone, letter, email) to assess how staff interact with them.
Neighbourhood Warden	Staff employed (sometimes by social landlords) to patrol estates in an attempt to reduce crime, anti-social behaviour, vandalism and graffiti. They work closely with the police but do not have the power to arrest offenders.
Nomination Right	The right of a local authority to put forward people for prospective tenancies with a housing association.
Performance Monitoring	The processes used by a social landlord to measure its performance over a range of tasks and compare it with targets or standards that have been set (by itself or outside agencies).
PFI	Private Finance Initiative. A method of getting capital works carried out, in which the capital costs of the project are entirely funded by the contractor, and who may undertake to manage it on completion, in return for an agreed long-term income.
Planned Maintenance	Repairs that are pre-planned in order to improve the housing stock in an economic and effective way. (Contrasts with 'responsive' or 'emergency' repairs, which happen just when things go wrong.)
Preserved Right to Buy	Secure tenants of a local authority have the right to buy the property in which they live. Assured tenants (i.e. most tenants of housing associations) do not

	normally have the right to buy. However, Right to Buy is 'preserved' in the case of most tenants whose homes are transferred from a local authority to another social landlord.
Private Finance	Money raised by housing associations by borrowing from financial organisations such as banks and building societies. Housing Associations use these loans to pay for that part of the cost of developing properties which is not met by grants.
Procurement	The process of seeking and appointing contractor(s) to carry out a project, such as buying land and building on it or doing major repairs and improvements.
Registered Provider (RP) of social housing	The term refers mainly to housing associations, but it also applies to local housing companies, community housing mutuals, trusts and housing co-operatives. It has largely replaced the term 'registered social landlord' which was previously used.
Revenue expenditure	Spending on regular, ongoing activities like housing management and repairs (as opposed to one-off activities like new building or major improvements).
Right to Buy	Some social housing tenants have the legal right to buy their homes at a price lower than the market value if they have been living there for more than 2 years.
Right to Manage	A statutory right for local authority tenants to form Tenant Management Organisations and take over collective management of their housing, in return for a Management and Maintenance Allowance from their council.
Right to Repair	A statutory right for tenants to claim compensation if certain small urgent repairs are not carried out by landlords within prescribed time limits.
Risk-Based Regulation	Rather than regulating all social landlords in the same way, the HCA aims to match the extent to which it intervenes with the level of 'risk' of each association.
Security of Tenure	A tenant's right to remain in their home indefinitely provided they have kept to the conditions of their tenancy agreement.
Service Charge	The money tenants and leaseholders pay for services such as wardens, common rooms and cleaning, lighting and maintenance of common parts.
Shared Ownership	An arrangement whereby tenants can part-buy / part-rent a property. The tenant may, over time, increase their mortgage payments and decrease their rent until they own the whole property.
Sheltered Housing	Housing specially provided for elderly people, providing someone near at hand to help them in an emergency.

Social Rented Housing	The general term for rented housing owned by local authorities and housing associations.
Stock Condition Survey	Surveys of the housing stock used by social landlords to assess the need for planned maintenance or major repairs and improvements.
Stock Transfer	Transferring the ownership and management of local authority housing to a registered social landlord such as a housing association.
Supported Housing	Accommodation for people with specific care needs, such as elderly people and people with disabilities. Residents are supported by paid care staff.
Tenant Participation Compacts	Agreements between social landlords and their tenants which set out how tenants can be involved, the issues they can be involved in, and the resources available to support tenant participation.
TMO	Tenant Management Organisation – set up to take over responsibility for managing aspects of the housing locally on behalf of the social landlord.
TPAS	Tenant Participation and Advisory Service
Void	A term used to describe a property that is not let. For example, a block of 10 flats that has 2 empty might be described as having '20% voids'.
Voluntary Board Member	The unpaid board members, directors or trustees who comprise the controlling bodies of housing associations.