

WHITE PAPER TALK paper

HOW DO YOU FREE UP THE RENTED HOUSING IN YOUR
PORTFOLIO THROUGH NEW TENURES AND PRODUCTS AND
BY BETTER MEETING NEEDS AND ASPIRATIONS?

WHAT IS ACHIEVABLE IN TERMS OF INCREASED CAPACITY
AND WITHIN WHAT TIMEFRAME?

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The Exam Question is in two parts

How do you free up Social Housing as the Government wishes.

The Government position is as I understand it:

“Inflexible, lifetime tenancies contribute to significant imbalances between the sizes of households and the properties they live in.

The second part

What is achievable in terms of increased capacity and within what timescale?

I must begin by reminding myself that there was really only one form of tenancy in the post war years and it was in 1981 that we started to talk of secure tenancies in social housing. Moreover, it is really only in the past five years that we have talked of “lifetime” tenancies.

In the room today we have some really professional managers who have got the “new” 21st century tenancies at their finger tips. But some comments to remind me of the complexity of tenancies today

TYPES OF COUNCIL TENANCIES

SECURE COUNCIL TENANCIES for existing tenants and there are a lot of them!

FLEXIBLE COUNCIL TENANCIES

From two years and at the end of the term offer another fix term or not renew and offer another home or repossess

INTRODUCTORY COUNCIL TENANCIES

If you have been a good tenant after 12 months your tenancy may become secure but not I assume a “lifetime” tenancy

TYPES OF HOUSING ASSOCIATION TENANCIES

HOUSING ASSOCIATION STARTER TENANCIES –

Become an assured or fixed term tenant after 12 months unless the Housing Association has started action to repossess or decides extended your starter tenancy

HOUSING ASSOCIATION ASSURED TENANCIES

Does this mean you can normally live in your home for ever?

HOUSING ASSOCIATION ASSURED SHORTHOLD TENANCIES

Please forgive me if I have skipped over the detail on these tenancies. I have taken a wider view. However, I will name Wealdon District Council's excellent and simple guide to the Tenancies offered by the Council.

Reading this and other guidance again I am struck by the need for tenants to get independent Housing Advice when or before accepting a tenancy.

The 16th November marked 50 years since "Cathy Come Home" was shown as the Wednesday Play on the BBC.

Seeing the play again this past Tuesday at the RICS I was struck by the fact that Cathy was not offered any independent housing advice. Housing Aid or Advice Centres such as Shelter did not exist then.

The key to ensuring we make the right decisions around who gets what, why, when, how and which tenancy is to invest in good marketing and PR to explain the detail to your applicants.

Tenancy strategies

I want to briefly cover Tenancy Strategies

The Localism Act 2011 introduced a requirement for local authorities to produce a tenancy strategy setting out the matters to which all providers of social housing should have regard in framing their own tenancy policies. Local authorities have an obligation to consult housing associations, on a draft of the strategy.

The Homes and Communities Agency requires that each Landlord's strategy must set out the following information:

- the type of tenancies they will grant
- where they grant tenancies for a fixed term, the length of those terms
- the circumstances in which they will grant tenancies of a particular type
- any exceptional circumstances in which they will grant fixed term tenancies for a term of less than five years in general needs housing following any probationary period.
- the circumstances in which they may or may not grant another tenancy on the expiry of the fixed term, in the same property or in a different property.
- the way in which a tenant or prospective tenant may appeal against or complain about the length of fixed term tenancy offered and the type of tenancy offered, and against a decision not to grant another tenancy on the expiry of the fixed term.

- Their policy on taking into account the needs of those households who are vulnerable by reason of age, disability or illness, and households with children, including through the provision of tenancies which provide a reasonable degree of stability.
- The advice and assistance they will give to tenants on finding alternative accommodation in the event that they decide not to grant another tenancy.
- Their policy on granting discretionary succession rights, taking account of the needs of vulnerable household members.

If I was a Board member of a Housing Association or a Council Scrutiny Committee or the lead Housing Cabinet Member, I would want to know what numbers we are talking about and how long before we free up the stock from Lifetime tenancies.

To adopt Local Authority Policies and Strategies and for an HA to have such a strategy it is critical that Councillors and Board members are trained to understand the detail The devil really is in the detail

Let us return then to the Exam questions.

How do you free up the stock?

And what is achievable in terms of increased capacity?

And within what time scale?

I want to deal with this in three parts:

1. **The Social Cost:**

a) Do your new tenant / applicants understand Remember the principal of KISS (Keep It Simple Stupid) and my earlier comments on good PR and marketing

b) What are the key social issues, growing families in the community, disability, mental health, economic, family support, NHS support.

c) Relationship between landlord to tenant.

d) In the future can a Housing Association or a Council claim to be Community capacity building or will insecure tenants really commit to the community?

2. The Business Issues and objectives

a) The benefits of freeing up the stock to overcome under occupation to then overcome overcrowding and in improving our performance in housing the statutory homeless households.

b) The cost of reletting and void management If your strategy is to increase the numbers of lettings by freeing up the stock then Budgets for Void repairs, gas and electric checks etc will need to be increased How many extra voids will there.

c) The additional time for front time housing staff and supported them by investing in first class customer relations management systems. .

d) Investing in Training, training and more training for the staff, the management and the governing body. It will be critical to train front line staff in emerging Ombudsman results court cases etc My point here is that “many a slip between cup and lip” over staff not understanding the law and the policies.

I also suggest joint training with your local Housing Advice Centre and a briefing for all Councillors.

e) Increasing cost of Challenge with court costs.

3. What influences what?

The need for stable business and long term relationships with tenants can this be achieved?

The need for stable policies, the danger of changing policies, every few years both Council and Housing Associations

Ministers seem to have accepted that these changes will not really have an impact before 2030. Why 2030? There is an accepted suggestion that these Government objectives to “loosen up the stock” will take at least 16 years to work through

Tenancy turn over will be critical to understand. In the 1980s my understanding was that the average tenancy lasted 7 years in General Needs and about 5 years in sheltered

In reality, all new build letting will be under this regime as the Government hopes nevertheless the greatest source of voids for reletting will be death of elderly tenants. This may well increase over the next 15 years as the tenants of 1950 / 60s lettings reach 80+ In business planning there is a clear need for demographic research to understand the age of your tenants to understand turnover .

The front line management of housing stock will become ever more complex and challenging as there will exist so many different tenancies in your stock and so many tenants on different journeys in the relations with the landlord. Training and retraining of frontline staff will become critical to business success.

Thank you.