



Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities

Sarah Healey CB CVO
Permanent Secretary

**Department for Levelling Up,
Housing and Communities**

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By email:

Dame Meg Hillier MP
Chair of the Public Account Committee

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18 December 2023

Dear Dame Meg

The Government has published its response to the Public Accounts Committee's (PAC) Seventy-Seventh Report of Session 2022-23. I am writing to you to provide more detail relating to recommendation 2 concerning how the department will work with and support local authorities.

2. PAC recommendation: Alongside its Treasury Minute response, DLUHC should write to the Committee outlining progress with its consultation with local authorities and set out its early thinking on how it intends to support them to implement the Act effectively, improve short-term supported housing and protect vulnerable residents.

The department has been working closely with the Local Government Association (LGA) and local authorities to deliver on our shared ambition of improving quality in supported housing, ensuring residents are receiving the support they need and deterring unscrupulous providers from operating. Since the introduction of the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act (the Act) we have been engaging with local authorities on the proposed design of the measures, particularly on the design of the local authority-led licensing regime, the National Supported Housing Standards, and the strategic planning duty placed on local authorities. This continued engagement is crucial to understand the potential burdens on local authorities and any unintended consequences that implementation of the Act could bring.

Engagement sessions

Between March and July this year, DLUHC held a series of stakeholder engagement sessions with local authorities, providers and residents across the country to strengthen and inform the policy proposals in the upcoming public consultation on the Act. This work builds on our previous engagement, following a Written Ministerial Statement in March 2022, which stated the intention to introduce new powers for local authorities and setting standards for the support provided to residents.

Collaboration and learning

In parallel, we have been working alongside the LGA to establish the Supported Housing Network. The Supported Housing Network is formed of representatives from a range of services in local authorities from across the country that will need to come together to support the successful implementation of the Act.

The department is encouraging providers and local authorities to collaborate and work with each other on the development of the Act's measures. Officials are currently working with the Supported Housing Network and the National Housing Federation to facilitate a series of workshops that consider the challenges and opportunities presented by the Act for both

housing providers and councils. Once the consultation is published, the department will be carrying out bespoke engagement with local authorities to hear about any issues or concerns they have, as well as potential solutions.

Separately, but connected, the department's Supported Housing Improvement Programme (SHIP) is funding 26 local authorities with £20 million to drive improvements to the quality of supported housing in some of the worst affected areas across the country. Participating authorities are conducting property inspections, reviews of the support being provided to residents, scrutinising housing benefit claims, and developing local needs assessments and strategic plans. These activities mirror the requirements that the Act will place on local authorities and the learning from SHIP will be crucially important in taking these measures forward effectively.

The Act places a duty on the Secretary of State to establish an Advisory Panel which will include representation from local housing authorities and social services authorities in England. The primary focus of the Panel will be to provide information and advice to Government as the measures in the Act are developed and implemented. Through the Panel, local authorities will have a voice to provide independent and real-time feedback to the Government on the impact of the measures on the supported housing sector.

Funding requirements

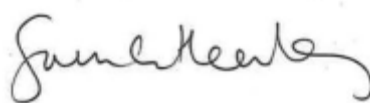
Local authorities will be supported through New Burdens funding, and we will consider what additional funding might be needed to ensure the successful implementation and enforcement of measures in the Act. We understand that local authorities will need time to prepare and build capacity for implementation. Following a public consultation, officials will produce detailed guidance in partnership with local authorities and other stakeholders to underpin the licencing regime, strategic planning and the assessment of National Supported Housing Standards. The department will continue to work with local authorities to prepare them for implementation.

Improving quality

The combination of measures in the Act will help to improve the quality of supported housing, including short term housing, for the vulnerable residents that call it home. The government is proposing that licensees will need to obtain a licence from their local authority to operate as supported housing, and they must meet the National Supported Housing Standards for the licence to be granted. Residents leaving their home because the National Supported Housing Standards are not being met will be offered protection from being found intentionally homeless. The department will be working with local authorities to help them understand and meet their duties in this regard.

We are committed to continuing to work closely with local authorities in the consultation, development and implementation of the Act's measures. I hope the above is helpful in outlining our current and future plans, which reflect a partnership between government and local authorities.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Sarah Healey', with a stylized, flowing script.

SARAH HEALEY