

## Written evidence submitted by Karen Edwards [RSH 114]

### Introduction - flat conversion focus

This is a combination to include your white paper and decent homes. This is for consultation only.

I am a social housing tenant now in the 14th year in the same property. I provide a personal view of an experience living in social housing as a mature woman, with learning disabilities that lives on my own that has a need to live alone that links to religion, disability, sexuality.

It is a terraced flat conversion. The present council structures does not adapt their process to street properties and are still done as if purpose built flats. If you live on your own in flat conversion, the intrusion for access can be health/life changing. Even though always giving the required access, these flats are left not being maintained as an asset that seems less of a priority than purpose built flats. This can be connected to the financial management of councils and a policy structure that staff are trained to follow at all times.

My question would be why hasn't this plan consultation been in place already? Why is it that to live in social housing it has been OK to treat tenants as if inadequate that could be, the same as why they were moved into social housing in the first place, from harassment, poor conditions, targeted behaviour that is now by council landlord representatives?

The following will be to go over your requirements of consultation.

### Quality of housing/impact of social housing provider's resources/building stock - (individual focus)

As a flat conversion that is left without purposeful investment maintenance from before I was a tenant, it sees this property deteriorate: subsidence affectinf other properties and constantly requires service such as doors sticking, structural cracks but is only patched ups. The quality is very poor with inadequate heating, damp, rain leaks, and neighbour appliance leaks, poor ventilation, poor lighting poor sound proofing, poor fireproof doors, shared water supply, by both flats, heating appliance poorly structured, rain leaks that show gas vapors could get back in. I was very ill that likely to be from CO monoxide poisoning, poorly converted. It can affect how I am treated in the neighbourhood as if I am the one not fit for purpose in 'their' neighbourhood,, which comes from a poor flat conversion.

### current regulators of social housing-fit for purpose/sufficient powers-

The roles of the regulator of social housing and the housing ombudsman, is not fit for purpose and does need to be reviewed.

### Can tenants effectively resolve issues -

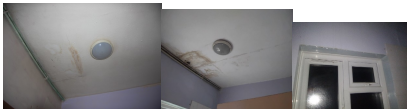
The answer in my experience is no. Complaints go in and always the minimum done, or the issue is not repaired at all.

The first complaint in 2009 had 3 stages. I had to take the whole year to go over this instead of settling and feeling safe from where I had moved from. The second stage gave me compensation and the 3rd stage did the same, but never received the compensation. The complaint structure was more thorough and fair, but my whole first year was having to put all my energy into the complaints and so should not have to go through all stages. Even with a thorough structure, what was advised by an independent surveyor did not happen, this was serious issues such as carbon monoxide poisoning from signs of defective flue structure as advising to remove boxing to check, the water tank cupboard leaking that had the gas meter and piping below it. The void team were refusing to take any responsibility. Having to constantly ask for the same work. Showing all departments work as one so not integrated to communicate between departments. Have recently found out that major works do not do outside structural works, this is responsible via the repairs team that never do so. It puzzles me why something can be called warmer, dryer, safer programme or quality housing programmes but they don't work together for this to be completed at the same time.

Any work would be minimal. In 2009 there was a rain water leak in my bedroom. They did not investigate where the leak came from, just replaced the ceiling, which sees the same problem today. Before they painted new ceiling, as soon as it rained it came through. They still went and just painted it. They did not investigate the cause. Today, even with a warmer, dryer, safer major works programme completed in 2015, which I had to provide nearly 3 months constant access, it was never corrected. It is still the same today. They still will not correct it, and try to redirect to prevent the focus.



Another area that was from 2009 was the bathroom. Reported via the complaints. All they did was replace the ceiling but did not investigate the cause. It is now has constant leak from above from the shower in above flat.



Area in front living room. Signs of damp that only saw them paint it. Today it shows same difficulties no dealing with cause.



cracking and subsidence in 2009, showing crack in front. Nothing done in 2009 and through attempts. Also nothing done in warmer, dryer, safer major works programme, just filled before painting, then came through soon after. Still like it today with many cracks now.



It has now come through inside. Never corrected. Still like it today, through 2 double electric sockets, party walls, bay window area, all due no interest in correcting, just minimal. The flat is coming away from both neighbouring properties. It seems to be sinking.



More cracks through neglect of finding causes. Too many to go over. Gas appliance issues that needed HSE involvement to get anything done

Illness in 2009 every time i put heating/hot water on. Over years, my health deteriorated. I had lost voice with airway issues from paralysis in 2012, internal issues through the next year, adrenals, liver, and related organs. By 2013 I was waiting for operation. A gas contractor came to do gas check as they do every year, but this time he said need a hatch in boxed flue. I was waiting for operation so he turned off gas. I improved in health and never needed the operation and could cancel it.

In 2009 a surveyor noted the staining on boxed flue and said to remove and check, but was never done until HSE supported me to get something done, due they were saying if I want hot water and heating to turn it back on. They changed it to electric. Signs of leak. Outside flue pipe had crack.



When opened flue showed poor structure. There was signs of rain water leak during the

opening of boxing. Cause of my illness could be due to mild carbon monoxide poisoning via entering from outside. If rain water can enter then so could vapours. When put electric heater in they then left it as it is shown. They left all the boxing. The heater is not big enough to even have a shower, just enough to fill a sink.



Damp has seen many belongings affected. Only told to go to my insurance or something they have, so again up to me to apply, not as part of their system to do what is right, but to put it all into the tenant's responsibility so away from theirs. This is in all areas of flat.



In 2021, regarding a complaint of the continuing problems, the resolution officer refused to meet me and closed my complaint. It took 4 months to get someone to actually meet me, from making further complaints about the handling, having to give up 3 job opportunities, never being able to ever build a life. Always having to get a temp job to build money to complain again, knowing what it will be like.

Housing officers treat tenants as if in an institution so causes a person to become institutionalised to be trapped from progressing. A programme about housing teams showed they treat them like their children, so showed to want us dependent on them, rather than being free as a tenant. Being in social housing should not mean you lose your freedoms.

**Will the reforms in the social housing white paper improve implementing reforms**

1- To be safe in your home - I don't see sufficient change to ensure of this that would change the experiences I have had. If you see the above evidence then feeling safe in the hands of a council and contractors is not possible and needs to see a complete change. I do not feel safe in my home.

2- Know performance of landlord repairs, complaints and safety and how use money - there would need to be the evidence of work along with outcomes and how often having to complete the same repairs. At present having to have repeated works have costed more than

if they corrected it at void level. Complaints that are made should not judge any tenant. How treated has seen other policies used to prevent complaining. The tenancy check has been used twice to stop me coming forward or after going to HSE. Once was when I asked for works on communal front door due to sticking due to subsidence and was an inadequate door that I asked to review to change. This was when I was very ill in 2013 that instead they held me to ransom for tenancy check instead of repairing door and caused alarm to harass me all through 2014 demanding excessive accesses that took all my energy. In early 2015 was major works programme. I gave all access but nothing was done. All the accesses through 2014 had no reason. This all is still the same today. Subsidence affects the doors, never corrected. Communal fire checks done each year say need to replace doors but never done. Just shave the door, not dealing with cause.



The other attempt to evict me was in December 2019, 3 months before the Homes Act would be active for social housing tenants, using inaccurate contact information, not sending letters, also evidence of email recalling. They knew I lived here. This actually was never justified.

There are different ways to feel safe and some is emotional Domestic by landlords. The way this is used needs a review. We should not feel harassed for works needed. Feeling unable to ask for works or investigations to find the cause should never happen. It is abuse and should never be part of any landlord structure. We should never fear housing officers or contractors. We should feel safe in our own home, not feeling it is somewhere only see contractors and council officers. We must be able to build a life for ourselves without the above constant need. They should not act as an authority, but as a landlord.

3- complaints dealt with promptly fairly and access to strong ombudsman - At this time the ombudsman is not an option as it would go with the council due they are seen as an authority compared to a tenant. Very rare has been seen as something that would change the situation. At present the council keeps the complaint at first stage even if the tenant shows to be unhappy. This needs to be addressed.

4- to be treated with respect supported by strong consumer regulator and improved standards - consumer regulator is not known, so unsure what this actually is. Respect within the present structure must be part of the landlord/tenant relationship. It just be seen as a landlord, not an authority. The respect for our time needed needs a review. Personally I have never been able to develop a career. Had to leave jobs to deal with demands that never is to correct the causes of the property. Having time off to give access then they don't turn up and access for major works programmes can be career destroying, especially for single tenants and needs a better way forwards.

5- have voice heard by landlord - As above. We are never heard. They only want to hear what they want to.

6- good quality home and neighbourhood to live in keeping your home in good repair - please see above evidence.

7- first steps to ownership - I feel that perhaps there needs to be a universal way to ownership. The structure should be to sell back to the council once in a position to move on and to stay in the property under lease for a minimum of 5 years. All council properties should be for first time buyers and so sold back once they are in a position to move on. At present the councils are selling to directors of property investors that use it for buy to let. Buy-to-let should never be part of a lease. Subletting should be criminal for leases too. If any leaseholder goes bankrupt or has property possessed then it should be sold back to council.

Investigations need to occur who the housing is being sold to. Some are not first time buyers and have many property developer companies. This should never be possible.

If there could be a non-deposit structure for first time buyers that show able to afford the mortgage amounts, via showing from rents paid and good credit, might provide a better ability for all first time buyers to get on the ladder. It does not need for this to be social housing.

Social Housing Tenancy - I believe after a probationary period lifetime tenancy should be kept. The tenancies only for 5 or 10 years gives councils the ability to continue to neglect their duty and then legally evict, which can never hold them to account. I remind that it was 5 years in May 2013/14 they held me to ransom for asking for repairs and continued to punish me. This could be seen as Domestic abuse knowing I was very ill. 5 years later they tried to serve me notice in Dec 2019 without foundation 3 months before the Homes Act for social housing would be active. This is 10 years left in poor conditions feeling a prisoner under a landlord. This made me fear to ask for repairs. Evidence is available.

If there was lifetime tenancies to live in housing safe, secure and warm, at quality, it would be better to hold landlords to account and allow us to develop careers, to save and be able to move on, in first steps to ownership. The social housing should be kept as social housing and not sold. There will always be tenants not able to move into ownership. It would be a need to be for this. No deposit need for ones that can, for first time buyers. If can show always in credit, on time with rent this should be enough.

8- Tenants charter - tenants voice, relationships, accountability, quality and complaints - this requires full investigation.

9- decent homes standards changes needed - Should meet minimum housing standards and be of reasonable states of repair, with reasonable modern facilities, reasonable degree of thermal standards, guaranteed building safety, good landlord performance satisfactory measures, holding landlords more to account,

Compensation for any failings sufficient - this can be life changing physically and emotionally to be a victim of poor housing conditions. There should not be a time limit element on the court structure. None of us really want to go via a court and can be many years before can see a social landlord pattern of behaviour. If the 6 years to take to court is abolished in housing of all kinds then it might see a better structure to invest and maintain social housing, including private landlord housing. At present it is cheaper for them to ignore works than do them. No compensation scheme can ever make up for years of harm caused by the neglect. This needs a review.

Vacant housing - there is vacant social housing, why is this so? Any housing, social or private

should never be empty. A structure to release these for homes needs a full review.

Accommodating disability and not discriminate. Reporting of behaviour towards all tenants, with or without taken seriously. All humans are different; cultural needs linked to age, religion, disability, sexuality, or experiences.

Sometimes single people can be treated poorly and prevented from bettering their lives. Being single might be part of the protected characteristics and must not be seen as unimportant in housing need. Most single people are who can show homelessness and needs the best way forward.

Work career - jobs when constantly ask for access that either don't turn up, or for repeated works due doing just patch ups disruption of work and life. Major works expect access for up to 3 months then don't do work needed - what are contractors paid to do?

Domestic abuse by landlords - Misusing power, misusing personal data, misusing policies, to stop a person asking for repairs, to not complain, and signs of not wanting us to involve councillors, or others such as charities, or the charities will not get involved.

Holding to account - the social landlord. They have all the expertise. We should be able to trust their judgement. They must put themselves in the position of the tenant, if they would live in the conditions for themselves or their families.

There must be an emotional attachment to human living conditions because if unfit for human living then this must be felt emotionally by housing providers to know.

Not a one size fits all approach for every social housing property. Such as insulation for housing. Flat conversions may not be suitable for this. If housing has damp problems then this would require to fix the cause. Fire alarm systems are not the same as for purpose built flats and should be adapted to the type. Other areas such as doors and structures should be the first area to protect from fire. Flat conversions do differ in maintenance requirements.

I trust my efforts to write this is useful towards the purpose.

*May 2022*