

Written evidence submitted by Nooraini Mydin [RSH 071]

These are my points regarding Housing Associations as social housing providers:

1. Transparency – Freedom of Information Act does not apply to Housing Associations. As a result they are totally unaccountable. For example, a council tenant can request information from their landlord under the FOI but housing association tenants cannot do so, giving housing associations the freedom to break all the rules in the book without accountability.
2. In the case of disrepair recently highlighted in South London, despite the ITV documentary showing the disgusting level of disrepair of Clarion Housing's properties, they managed to persuade the Social Housing Regulator to lower the standard and hence, find that Clarion did not fall below the required standard. I find this sickening; an abuse of power by the Social Housing Regulator to help their cronies.
3. Housing Associations enjoy perks from their status as a charity. This includes a tax-free status. Despite this, they behave like a greedy corporation which thinks nothing of cheating people on social housing by creating fictitious service charges and/over-charging. In 2008 I organised two petitions, one against a 150% hike in charges for four months of off peak heating and hot water, and on both occasions, Circle Housing backed down.
4. Circle became Clarion Housing in 2017 and before long, they started inventing new service charges for my building, Clare House E3 5PY. They use service charges as a way of making money because social housing rental is controlled by the government. They never show us the actual bill and from my experience with Circle Housing in 2008, they were just making up the figures.
5. After cheating us by charging for fictitious services, they also profit from a 15% administration for that charge.
6. Housing Associations should never be allowed to merge into such a huge entity like Clarion Housing which now seems to operate like a monopoly. They should be returned to the original organisation they were created to be, to serve people who need homes, not to serve themselves and profit from the very people they're supposed to help. Clarion were charging ridiculous amounts in service charges but we were getting a poorer service overall. We used to have a housing manager who would visit the building regularly but since Clarion took over Clare House in 2017 we never saw anyone.
7. On 5 October 2021 I and more than 120 other households had to move from Clare House which was decanted, apparently for safety reasons. However, we were not allowed to see the report that said it was unsafe. The manner in which Clarion delivered the news was callous. We had an eight-page, unsigned letter put through

our door and then their officers saw us individually, telling us “you have to leave in 48 hours.” No empathy, nothing. The officer who saw me was just reeling off a list of questions without listening to my answers. After I had asked him some very serious questions, he had the audacity to ask me if I had learning disabilities. And I have three Law qualifications.

The officers who were encamped in our community hall for the next month were no better. They refused to give me more than three boxes; imagine having to pack a flat I had been in for 16 years in three boxes. They told us to just take our essentials.

They should have organised a meeting, even an online one to relay the message to us collectively. Instead, we were caught like deer in headlights, many in tears. I believe they did this deliberately in case, when grouped together, we would be in a stronger position to refuse to move.

8. As I mentioned before, the social housing regulator seems to be in cahoots with Clarion Housing. Imagine a housing association that had left property in such disrepair that ITV could make a documentary about it, when the matter reached their desk, to agree to Clarion’s request for them to apply a lower standard when dealing with the complaint, enabling Clarion Housing’s standard of performance to be deemed acceptable.

Even trying to get a matter seen by the Housing Ombudsman is not easy because we have to go through Clarion’s own complaints process and more often than not, they just decide there was no problem in the first place. From my previous experience of using the Ombudsman service, you can go straight to them with a problem. Perhaps things have changed since then.

I urge the committee to look at the power given to housing associations and remove their charity status because they do not behave like a charity but like a greedy corporation. Furthermore they should not be allowed to become as huge as Clarion Housing has become to the extent that they become detached from the people who pay their salaries.

December 2021