

## Written evidence submitted by Peabody [RSH 093]

### About Peabody

Peabody is a registered provider of social housing. We are one of the oldest and largest housing associations in London and the Southeast, established in 1862 by the philanthropist George Peabody.

Peabody is responsible for 66,000 homes, including 3,500 supported housing homes, and we provide quality housing and support services to over 150,000 people in total. This includes helping over 18,000 people covered by our care and support services reach their personal goals, live well, be self-reliant and connected to their community. We provide supported housing services for people with a wide range of needs, including mental ill health, complex needs and learning disabilities, as well as vulnerable young people and the homeless.

Our mission is to help people make the most of their lives. We do this by developing and delivering reliably good modern services, building and maintaining the best quality developments, working with local communities and building long-term partnerships, and growing and using our position of influence to create positive change.

---

### Introduction

As a member of the G15 group, a joint submission has been prepared with our involvement and our views on the specific questions raised are set out as part of that response. The inquiry raises matters that are important to us here at Peabody, so we have taken the opportunity to supplement this collective response with some key points from purely our perspective.

### Key points

We feel that regulation is very important for securing the best outcomes for customers and maintaining high standards. We find overall that the current regulatory system is effective; it is firm and yet fair. However, we welcome the scrutiny into how the practices work from our perspective and the customers that need to access these routes, as this can only bring improved services for our customers.

*On the regime for regulating social housing, and their powers:*

- We think that the regulator has a good focus on the sustainability of the social housing sector and the issues that we face and its expansion into consumer regulation is long overdue
- The regulator works well in partnership with the Housing Ombudsman, considering individual complaints which have been raised by residents to understand if they have been handled correctly by social housing providers. It is however important that the Ombudsman is resourced enough to ensure they can handle caseloads effectively, and deliver a better service for both Housing Associations and residents.

- We are confident that the Social Housing White Paper will define and clarify roles and accountability for regulation, as we see the introduction of the Building Safety regulator and the New Homes Ombudsman.
- We welcome the Ombudsman working with the Ministry of Justice on pre-action protocol, which should help clarify the most effective routes of escalating a complaint.

Our forthcoming merger with Catalyst is predicated on providing an improved customer experience and we are taking this responsibility very seriously. We acknowledge that as we get bigger we need to do things differently, and are structuring ourselves to have a greater understanding of our strengths and weaknesses at a local level, to stay connected, and to drive action that has the most impact.

We take customer engagement seriously, using the insight we gain through these channels to drive improvement, and regularly take a deep dive into areas of our service to understand our performance from all perspectives. In the future, we will use this insight to understand our local areas better.

*On the Social Housing White Paper and resident voice:*

- We are very supportive of the new resident satisfaction measures proposed by the Regulator, and the consultation to assist in developing fair and transparent ways of evaluating performance. It is currently very easy to provide a favourable performance statistic, and ultimately to report a very inconsistent picture amongst providers. What is needed is complete clarity on approach and methodology, with the views and voice of our customers at the centre. In this way the regulatory process can help us to drive up standards in the sector.
- We would welcome the introduction of legislation to enable the policies set out in the Social Housing White Paper in parliament as soon as possible, so that all housing associations are able to implement the legal requirements in full.

We feel that everyone should have access to a high quality and affordable home. Ensuring our homes are safe, warm, and dry is fundamental to helping more people to live well. We find ourselves in a position where we have a number of financial pressures that all need addressing with some urgency in order to ensure we make good on this commitment. This includes building safety remediation work, retrofitting our homes to make them more energy efficient, improving the quality of existing homes and building more affordable housing. We are committed to tackling all of these pressures, and prioritising investment to continue to do so and reduce any potential impacts to our customers.

We have recently seen an increase in damp and mould cases and the destructive impact this has on our residents. We have repositioned ourselves to deal with this, employing a specialist damp contractor to take a holistic approach to the homes affected, and empowering our teams to do the right things to ensure quality of our homes. A new standard around our homes will need to be flexible enough to consider a wide range of quality issues for a diverse stock profile now and into the future.

*On the financial pressures we face and the decent homes standard:*

- We believe that the Decent Homes Standard should be updated to reflect the changing priorities and pressures of maintaining homes, including quality and energy efficiency. The new Decent Homes Standard should:
  - Be simple in order to increase resident engagement and reduce disputes.
  - Take account of residents' feedback
  - Embrace modern technologies
  - Be in line with current government policy priorities and strategies
- Review of the Decent Homes Standard should come with funding to enable housing associations to implement these standards, especially on quality and energy efficiency, and particularly in the context of the various other financial pressures we currently face.
- The Decent Homes Standard needs to be focussed on achieving a baseline standard for all properties, given the diversity of our stock, and we would prefer that the approach takes this into consideration
- In relation to the Decent Homes Standard to include energy efficiency, we welcome a fair approach in line with the private rented sector which avoids additional costs being passed to our residents

*December 2021*