

Frances Walker
Department for Communities and Local Government
Zone 1/J9, Eland House
Bressenden Place
London
SW1E 5DU



17 January 2010

Dear Frances,

Local decisions: a fairer future for social housing

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a short response to the recent consultation on social housing.

Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) is a coalition of four national charities formed to influence policy and practice change for adults facing multiple needs and exclusions. These individuals face a combination of problems (such as homelessness, substance misuse, mental ill health and offending) and are often poorly served by statutory and voluntary agencies that deal with just 'one problem at a time'. As a result these individuals 'recycle' around local services and live chaotic and expensive lives.

The government has made clear its commitment to supporting this group of vulnerable individuals throughout its reforms. We make a number of brief points below in relation to the questions in the consultation paper. This letter supports a much more detailed submission to this consultation made by Homeless Link.

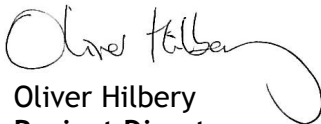
- **Supply:** The overriding issue around social housing is one of supply. Increasing supply would help address many of the issues raised in the consultation paper.
- **Fixed term tenancies (Q9 and 10):** We do not believe that fixed terms tenancies are suitable for social housing and the development of sustainable, active, communities. As the consultation paper recognises on four occasions social housing provides a stable and affordable alternative to private rented accommodation. Removing secure tenancies will erode this differentiation. If the government decides fixed term tenancies must be developed there should be a much higher minimum period, particularly for vulnerable groups such as those with experience of homelessness, mental ill health, substance misuse or offending. This should not mean that social tenants are prohibited from moving to alternative housing within the period should they see the benefits of doing so and the provision of advice suggested at (Q15) should be available to any tenant that wishes to look at their options at any time.
- **Allocation (Q20 and 21):** We are pleased that the reasonable preference categories will remain. There is an opportunity during this process to expand these categories to provide explicit mention of single homeless people and those facing multiple problems such as substance misuse, mental ill health and offending. As an additional point, the policy allowing local authorities to

control access to waiting lists should ensure that no individual from a nationally agreed reasonable preference category is excluded locally.

- **Discharge of homelessness duty (Q28):** We do not agree with the proposal to end the homelessness duty with an offer of an assured shorthold tenancy in the private rented sector, which is all too often unstable and highly problematic for those with vulnerabilities in their lives. A one-year AST period will not provide the stability needed for individuals with multiple needs and exclusions to address their issues and seek alternative accommodation. Should the government decide to allow discharge to the private rented sector in this way we suggest a much longer minimum AST period. In addition, we are concerned that in many areas a discharge to the private rented sector may mean a move outside area (or to other parts of a local area) that causes an individual to lose social capital and support networks. This is particularly the case given the Housing Benefit changes that are currently occurring and should be actively prevented within the proposals.

Thank you again for the opportunity to respond. We would be pleased to discuss any aspect of this response in more detail.

With best wishes,



Oliver Hilbery
Project Director