

Nottingham City Homes tenants  
c/o Nottingham City Homes  
Loxley House  
Station Street  
Nottingham NG2 3NJ

[Peer]  
House of Lords  
London  
SW1A 0PW

janet.storar@nottinghamcityhomes.org.uk  
0115 746 9161

25 February 2016

[Dear Peer]

### **Housing and Planning Bill 2015-16**

As Chair of the Board of Nottingham City Homes and a tenant of almost forty years, I am writing on behalf of tenants and residents of council homes in Nottingham.

I wanted to convey a sense of our feelings about the Housing and Planning Bill prior to the next Parliamentary stage of the legislation.

We organised an event for tenants so that they could learn more about the Bill. We were overwhelmed by the response, and so had to organise another. More than 200 people attended. Tenants were angry, upset and in the dark about the Bill's proposals. The overwhelming sense is that the Bill is unfair in principle and will be wrong in practice. We agreed collectively to write to you.

Three parts of the Bill were of most concern.

#### **The ending of tenure security.**

Tenure security allows people to build a stable life for themselves and their families, in the same way that owner occupiers do. There is no incentive to decorate and improve your home, maintain your garden, or put down roots in the community if you feel that you will only be able to live there for between two and five years, with the constant worry that sooner or later you will be forced to hand back the keys to your family home. All the problems associated with transient private renting will be created in council housing, with serious consequences for neighbourhoods and communities too. Increased turnover and transience would raise administration and repairs costs for landlords as well. The lack of security of tenure would cause increased anxiety and stress impacting on health, and parents would not know if their children could remain at the same schools if they had to move.

Tenants said:

“This part of the Housing Bill will annihilate the community. It will affect community cohesion and impact on family life”.

“It makes me angry. Where are families expected to go after five years?”

“The worry of not knowing if I would have to move would affect my mental health – I would not want to have to move away from my family, my local church and the community that supports me.”

“Who’s going to plant a tree in their garden knowing they will never be there to see it grow?”

### **The sale of ‘high value’ council homes to reimburse housing associations for discounted sales.**

This proposal was widely seen as ‘robbing Peter to pay Paul’. Those losing out would be people seeking to rent affordable council-owned homes who would see them sold to raise money to facilitate the sale of housing association homes at discounts to people who can afford mortgages. One tenant said “it’s like Robin Hood... in reverse”. There was great scepticism that the sales would generate the revenue to meet the shortfalls in housing association finances. As a result tenants feared:

“High value would just be redefined to include more and more homes, so more and more got sold”.

“I live in a council home that some might consider ‘high value’ – why should someone who comes after me not be able to live in a council house in this neighbourhood?”

It was noted that some of the higher value properties could be bungalows, often in urgent need by people with disabilities, and often specially adapted for those with mobility problems:

“Our properties have been adapted for tenants with disabilities. If they are sold then other homes will have to be adapted too, at extra cost”.

“There will no longer be any affordable council housing in certain neighbourhoods – council housing will be marked out as something that is only in poorer areas”.

### **Higher rents for higher earners – ‘Pay to Stay’.**

“An assault on ambition”, in the words of one tenant. These proposals set an income threshold for higher rents which is an insult to describe as a ‘high income’. Two people earning just over the minimum wage in full time work would trigger the requirement to pay a higher level of rent. No one would define such an income as high.

It was pointed out that in many cases a raised rent could bring households into the criteria where Housing Benefit would be payable. This would create costly administration, where incomes have to be means tested to set higher rents, and then Housing Benefit assessments and claims would have to be processed as a consequence. This would all be at a cost to the landlord and the Exchequer.

“What incentive would people have to work more hours or increase their income if they thought they would then have to pay higher rents?”

“I would not be able to afford the private sector market rents on my wage as a health care assistant.”

“As a tenant and a working person on a low income I recognise the value of affordable council housing as it enables me to live in comfort at a rent that I can afford to pay myself. If the rent goes up I might have to claim Housing Benefit, what is the point of that?”

Tenants felt very strongly that any income raised from such a measure should be spent locally on affordable housing.

We know many members in the House of Lords share these concerns. I would urge you to consider supporting amendments which remove the most damaging impacts of the Bill.

We recognise that some of the proposals won't affect existing tenants, but they will have a devastating impact on people on the waiting list. I know first-hand the value of a decent affordable and secure home, and we want to ensure council housing is a valued legacy for future generations.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Janet Storar".

**Janet Storar MBE**  
**Chair of the Board of Nottingham City Homes - tenant of nearly 40 years standing**