

CCH

Policy Report 2016

CCH membership consultation – the CCH has carried out considerable policy work since our AGM in 2015. Our policy work has largely stemmed from priorities set for us by our membership at our 2015 AGM, through a membership consultation carried out after our conference, and through two CCH member forums held in Liverpool (October) and London (March).

Through the CCH, the co-operative housing sector is now more united than it has ever been. The CCH currently has 160 member organisations – the vast majority of these members are Registered Provider¹ housing co-ops, mostly from either London or Liverpool – the two areas of the country where most housing co-ops exist. Our membership also includes some other types of co-op housing and we have to ensure that we include consideration of their needs.

Since March 2015, we have particularly had extensive dialogue with our membership on the elements that make up the Housing and Planning Bill. The results of this consultation, alongside many member briefings circulated as more became known about the outcomes of the Housing and Planning Bill, were circulated to our membership through the membership area of our website.

The Housing and Planning Bill – the Housing and Planning Bill has had a chequered journey through Parliament, with the House of Lords voting that a number of areas need to be reconsidered. Whilst it is still not clear how various issues will be addressed, it would seem that most of the difficult issues that could have affected our sector are unlikely to do so.

The Right to Buy – of all the proposed policies, CCH member organisations expressed most concern about a Right to Buy being imposed. Our understanding is that our dialogue with Government, and the National Housing Federation who are working on the Voluntary Right to Buy with Government, has resulted in us successfully ensuring that housing co-ops (and community land trusts) have the discretion not to sell their homes to their members.

Our dialogue has suggested to us that fully mutual housing co-ops and our tenancies are seen as alien to the housing association sector. We generally welcome this, but, whilst the vast majority of respondents to our survey were strongly against a Right to Buy for housing co-ops, a small minority responded that co-op members should be able to buy their homes. How co-op members might be supported to buy homes elsewhere is an area that the CCH may further explore in the future.

¹ Registered Provider means that a housing co-op received public funding to build their homes and that it is registered with the Government regulator, the Homes and Communities Agency. These are the co-ops that will be particularly affected by the changes proposed in the Housing and Planning Bill.

Pay to Stay – the proposed Pay to Stay was the second most important issue raised by respondents to the CCH membership survey. The CCH passed on our members' concerns on to Government in our response to their consultation on Pay to Stay (available in our member only area of our website). The Government has now agreed not to impose Pay to Stay on housing co-ops.

Lifetime tenancies – the Government's proposal to stop new council housing tenants having lifetime tenancies will only affect CCH member organisations who are managing council homes. If it is decided to extend this to the housing co-op sector, the CCH will explore methods to ensure that co-ops are protected in relation potential legal implications on fully mutual tenancies.

Rent reductions – following lobbying by the CCH and others, the Government included housing co-ops in the groups that are not required to reduce their rents in the first year of the four-year programme. This means that in this year, co-ops may set their rents between an increase of CPI plus 1% and a decrease of 1%. We are in dialogue regarding what will happen beyond the first year.

Deregistration – the 2015 CCH AGM requested that we explore whether and how co-ops might be able to deregister from the regulator. Guidance on deregistration is set out on the Homes & Communities Agency website. Deregistration may be possible where Registered Providers (RPs) have paid off their loans and in relation to two key criteria for deregistration:

- satisfactory arrangements need to be in place to protect tenants. This means that the deregistering RP needs to have satisfactory business arrangements in place regarding ongoing governance and financial viability and that their performance against regulatory standards is satisfactory.
- satisfactory arrangements are in place to prevent misuse of public funds. Social housing homes need to remain social homes – and the deregistered RP still has to get regulatory permission to dispose of properties.

The CCH regularly engages with the Homes and Communities Agency – both on specific issues and on general issues regarding co-ops. The CCH Board has carefully considered whether we should discuss deregistration with the HCA, but is of the view that this is not a current priority for our sector.

Development of the co-operative housing sector – the CCH's lobbying work was largely done through contact with various politicians in the Commons and the Lords. Through them, various requests were made about co-operative housing – which resulted in UK Government Ministers in both houses making strong statements of support for our sector.

In **England**, the Housing and Planning Bill includes measures to encourage the growth of self-build and *custom build* (an uncomfortable term that means housing developed by communities and groups, including housing co-ops). This will include requiring local authorities to hold registers of individuals who wish to set up community-led housing organisations, and to facilitate that process if

there are significant numbers of people who wish them to. As well as this, the Spring budget included £60m per annum, funded through the second home levy, to support community-led homes development in rural and coastal areas. We are exploring with Government what this means in practice, but this could result in the development of significant numbers of community-led homes.

The CCH is also currently supporting a programme led by the Building and Social Housing Foundation to develop an alliance between community-led housing representative bodies in England. This programme is currently exploring whether a national portal system can be established which people and organisations can contact for advice on developing community-led housing.

In **Wales**, the recently re-elected Labour Welsh Government has re-stated its commitment to co-operative housing - "Wales has led the way in developing new co-operative and mutual solutions to housing needs. Over the last four years, working with the Wales Co-operative Centre and the CCH, we have initiated 25 co-operative housing projects across Wales. We'll continue to give communities their own voice, and the ability to develop their own answers to local housing issues." We are proud to have supported the development of many new schemes all over Wales, across different tenures, and enabling people to develop new co-operative housing who otherwise would not have had this opportunity. We are pleased that this work will continue.

The CCH is launching our publication **1001 Co-operative and Community-led Homes: the Housing Revolution Starts Here** at our annual conference (available on our website @ www.cch.coop/1001co-ophomes). The publication is an inspirational directory of 26 recently developed co-operative housing schemes. The diversity of the schemes featured sets out a variety of ways that new co-op housing schemes could be developed.

Forthcoming activities – responding to requests by our members, the CCH intends to produce two member briefings in 2016 on (a) viability and long term finance planning for co-ops and on (b) governance sustainability. These will be circulated to our members through the member only area on our website. The CCH will also sustain its activities in relation to lobbying as necessary in relation to further Governmental changes to the Registered Provider sector. The CCH is currently exploring options for market, intermediate and social rental co-ops in London, and is also promoting co-operative home ownership models where appropriate (particularly in Wales and in new mayoralty areas).

The CCH membership now includes 5 large mutual housing associations and we are working with them on a project called **Mutual Governance Mutual Outcomes** – exploring the beneficial results they get from having democratic membership involved in their governance. The CCH has also led the **Investing in Involvement** programme working with the National Tenant Organisations to develop a national framework for landlords to work with their tenants to identify and publicise the benefits they get from involving tenants.

Nic Bliss – CCH Head of Policy - nic@cch.coop 07947 019287