**North East Tenant Voice Meeting**

**Friday 15 January 2021 11.00 – 12.30**

**held via Zoom Conference Call**

**Attendance**

John Johnson – Bernicia Chief Executive

Nigel Wilson – Gentoo Chief Executive

Jenny Osbourne – TPAS Chief Executive

Tracey Harrison - Northern Housing Consortium (HNC) Chief Executive

36 Tenants/Colleagues – Interested parties from Believe Housing, Bernicia, Broadacres Housing, Darlington Borough Council, Gateshead Housing Company, Home Group, Johnnie Johnson Housing, Karbon Homes, Thirteen Group, Your Homes Newcastle, York Housing Group and Gentoo

**Notes**

Emma Wetherald – Gentoo Governance Assistant

**Introduction**

John Johnson opened the meeting and thanked everyone for attending. John advised that the North East Tenant Voice (NETV) Group provided the opportunity for those involved to have a positive impact on the housing issues experienced in the North of England. John explained that the aim of the NETV was to positively raise challenges and find solutions to common issues.

John commented that the meeting would include two guest speakers and break-out sessions which would be very interactive. John added that respect and tenant engagement were key themes of the Social Housing White Paper, and that the paper would be discussed in more detail later in the meeting. John explained that it was vitally important that the sector engaged with tenants in their decision making to ensure that the best solutions were found for everyone.

**Previous NETV Discussions**

Nigel Wilson gave a presentation which had been delivered at the previous NETV meeting in January 2020. NW commented that the NETV would represent tenants from across the region with one voice to highlight regional challenges and opportunities. Nigel explained that housing providers needed to ensure that the voice of the North was heard in order to influence both regional and national decision makers. Nigel added that the NETV would take a collaborative approach and be challenging and supportive on key issues.

**White Paper Challenges/Opportunities**

Jenny Osbourne commented that she was the Chief Executive of TPAS, which was an organisation which specialised in tenant engagement. Jenny outlined the seven key focuses of the Social Housing White Paper and how these areas related to tenant engagement. Jenny commented that the right to be safe in your home was a fundamental issue for tenants and that significant progress had been made to ensure the safety of housing provision since the Grenfell tragedy.

Jenny advised that tenants should know how their landlord is performing, have complaints dealt with properly and fairly, and be treated with respect. Jenny explained that the Social Housing White Paper also focussed on the provision of good quality homes and neighbourhoods, and supported tenants taking their first step to home ownership.

Jenny highlighted that the Social Housing White Paper provided many areas for the NETV to focus on. Jenny added that the creation of a National Tenant Voice, a lack of social housing and tackling social housing stigma were not included in the paper but could be issues for the NETV to explore.

**Group Breakout Discussions**

The attendees were divided into five break-out groups and asked to consider the following questions:

* What should be the future priorities of the NETV?
* What lessons have been learned from the COVID-19 situation?
* How do we move things forward?

A feedback summary has been provided below.

1. **What should be the priorities for the NETV?**

Most break-out groups felt that the key areas of the Social Housing White Paper should drive the priorities of the NETV. One group also suggested that a gap analysis could be undertaken to discover further issues not fully covered in the paper which could then be focussed on by the NETV.

There was a consensus that the NETV should focus on reducing the stigma around social housing. It was highlighted that the stigma was contributed to by media coverage rather than being a result of the actions of housing providers. It was suggested that the NETV should positively promote social housing and challenge negative perceptions in the media.

The break-out groups suggested that the priorities of the NETV could include a focus on fire safety, increasing the supply of affordable housing, improving the standards of existing housing stock, the levelling up of Government resources and a focus on improving neighbourhoods.

It was highlighted that the promotion of home ownership had been included within the Social Housing White Paper, and it was felt that this was not appropriate.

It was suggested that the NETV should be used as a vehicle to lobby government on the key issues for the sector, and not focus on issues which were for specific to individual organisations.

**What lessons have been learned from the COVID-19 situation?**

It was agreed that although digital methods had enabled limited tenant engagement activity to be undertaken during the COVID-19 situation, human contact was also needed for tenants to fully participate in engagement work. The break-out groups all commented that the COVID-19 situation had highlighted that there was a digital divide between the individuals wishing to participate in the NETV activity.

1. **How do we move things forward?**

There was a consensus that further digital training was required to ensure that everyone had the digital capability to participate in the work of the NETV. It was highlighted that a commitment was required from organisations and tenant bodies to resource effective training in order to improve the digital skills of tenants.

The feedback supported the continuation of NETV work throughout any restrictions, and the participants commented that the delay in relation to COVID-19 had been frustrating.

One break-out group commented that the NETV should ensure that Local Authority tenants were included in any engagement activity undertaken given that they were recently added to the NETV Group.

**Tenant Voice and achieving Net Zero in Housing Stock**

Tracey Harrison advised that climate emergency was a significant global crisis, and highlighted the contribution of the housing sector to carbon emission levels. Tracy outlined a NHC proposal for a Citizen’s Jury to review the approach of social landlords to the housing retrofits needed to reduce carbon emission levels.

Tracey suggested that the NETV participate in work which would focus upon de-carbonisation and the impact of housing retrofits on tenants’ lives. Tracey advised that the Citizen’s Jury would provide the NETV with a strong starting point, support tenant engagement and demonstrate that the North East housing sector was leading the way on the reduction of carbon emissions.

Nigel Wilson commented that the reduction of carbon emission was a key issue and that the NETV group would consider whether to proceed with the Citizen’s Jury alongside its other priorities.

**Wrap Up Discussion**

Nigel Wilson commented that it was positive to see such a high level of engagement during the break-out session. Nigel advised that that the notes of the current meeting would be circulated ahead of the next meeting which would take place in approximately four weeks. Nigel added that future meetings would happen every six weeks in order to maintain momentum.

John Johnson commented that the meeting had been extremely positive and that future meetings would also include discussion sessions to allow participants to engage in the activity.