

Notice of Motion received from Councillor Osborne:

“Motion on Housing and Planning Bill 2016

This Council notes:

The Government’s proposal to extend the Right to Buy to Housing Association tenants is to be paid for by a forced sell off of the most expensive Council Housing stock. The proposals in the Bill allow the Secretary of State to require a regular payment from councils based on an amount determined by central government in secondary legislation.

The LGA “First 100 Days” campaign highlighted there are 1.7 million households on waiting lists for affordable housing across England and that there are more than 3.4 million adults between 20 and 34 living with their parents.

Social rents are not subsidized, they are set at levels which pay in full for the management, maintenance and renewal of properties and the debt interest.

The so called 'Pay to Stay' will see rents for a 2 bed property in Lewes District double from approx. £100 pw to £200 pw if they are charged at the Local Housing Allowance Limit and go up to £269 pw if at market level.

60,000 households in England will be unable to afford to remain in their council properties from April next year as a result of ‘Pay to Stay’ (according to report commissioned by the LGA).

214,000 households will be affected by the ‘Pay to Stay’ policy in England.

Proposals to increase rents for ‘high-income’ tenants are likely to be a disincentive to work and may well disproportionately affect women. The Resolution Foundation found that a household with two earners (in Oxford for e.g.) which took on one more hour of work per week (tipping earnings over £30,000) would see rent increase by £4,000 a year.

The policy will reduce spending power and there will be a negative effect on the local economy.

The Government’s proposals would remove flexibilities of councils to offer different kinds of tenancies in response to local need.

The requirement to review each tenancy every five years would be a significant administrative burden and difficult to police.

Proposals on planning in the Bill, including national interventions in local plan making and new performance regimes, risk putting additional strain on stretched local planning authorities while taking away local community influence.

Proposals to exempt Section 106 affordable housing contributions will likely cut £3 billion of investment from the supply of affordable and social rented properties. The Government's own impact analysis suggests that for every 100-starter homes built through section 106 agreements, between 56 and 71 affordable or social rented homes will not be built.

This Bill is a further attack on the freedom of local authorities with 34 new powers being given to the Secretary of State.

Motion

Council opposes the forced sell off of council housing to pay for this plan and is concerned that the Government's Bill also:

- i) Will have the unintended consequence of reducing the availability of much-needed council housing
- ii) Effectively gives Government the freedom to decide how much it would like to 'tax' each council with housing stock, and to define high value for their area to deliver that figure.
- iii) Could hamper the ability of local authorities to invest in new affordable council housing and create the right mix of housing that local residents can afford.
- iv) Will lead to an increase in the housing benefit bill as more people are forced to move into the more expensive private-rented sector, and do little to help councils reduce homelessness and reduce spending on temporary accommodation.
- v) Will put more pressure on existing local infrastructure because of the proposals to exempt 200,000 starter homes from the Community Infrastructure Levy and other infrastructure spending pots.
- vi) That local planning authorities, will no longer have enough flexibility to shape the number, type and quality of Starter Homes within and across developments alongside other types of affordable housing. It is vital that new housing products are delivered in response to the needs of residents and economies in local housing markets as assessed locally by councils as part of developing their local plans.
- vii) That the process for determining the additional income from the so called 'Pay to Stay' is unlikely to reflect the reality for tenants and councils or the difficulty of adjusting rents in line with fluctuating household incomes.
- viii) Local Authorities' will be taking all the risk and Government all the benefit as the payment due from councils, is based on a national estimate whether or not that estimate is borne out in reality.
- ix) It may create more need for housing if parents ask adult earning children to leave to reduce household income below the 'Pay to Stay' threshold.
- x) It will be costly to administer and police. Collection rates will be difficult to maintain.

- xi) It may damage the relationship between the council and its tenants
- xii) It is likely that the policy may encourage an increase in Right to Buy that would reduce the numbers of higher income tenants.
- xiii) We are concerned the Government's proposals would remove flexibilities on councils to offer different kinds of tenancies in response to local need.
- xiv) The requirement to review each tenancy every five years would be a significant administrative burden on councils.

Council resolves:

1. To work with other neighbouring authorities to oppose the current government proposals to force councils to sell off high value stock (or any equivalent charge based on estimates of high value stock);
2. To write to local MPs, asking them to support the Council's position and to speak up in parliament for;
 - a) To push for more social housing and to push for a genuine "one for one" replacement but not at the cost of losing more council housing.
 - b) To leave Councils free to manage their housing assets and to retain 100 per cent of receipts to invest in new and existing homes. As a minimum all councils should retain sufficient funds to replace each home sold on a like for like basis. This should also apply to council Right to Buy, as required rent reductions reduce the capacity of councils to replace those homes sold under the scheme.
 - c) To recycle the discount on Starter Homes in perpetuity, as is the case in council exception schemes, or extend it, so that more families can benefit.
 - d) To make voluntary the proposals to increase rents for 'high-income' tenants, as it will be for housing associations. Councils should also retain any additional income to reinvest in new and existing housing. Local flexibility on rents would enable councils to ensure that housing remains affordable for tenants, particularly key groups likely to be affected such as those working in education, healthcare and other public services.
 - e) To leave Councils free to manage their tenancies in a way that drives best value from stock while supporting strong local communities.
 - f) To allow councils to set planning fees locally to ensure effective, responsive and fully funded council planning services.
 - g) To amend the Bill to give councils greater flexibility on Article 4 planning directions, which remove the automatic right to convert properties between different types of use, to manage the problems caused by concentrations of houses in multiple occupations in small areas. Amendments to notice period and compensation provisions for Article 4 directions would allow local authorities to respond to resident and landlord concerns and local priorities more effectively.

- h) To provide flexibility for local authorities to exempt certain types of development and development on certain land or in certain areas from the permission in principle development order as well as from the register of land.

- i) To press the government to publish Draft regulations as soon as possible to allow for effective scrutiny.”

Notice of Motion received from Councillor Murray:

“This council acknowledges the strong belief of many of our local residents that Lewes Crown Post Office is under threat.

It further takes on board the fact that the downgrading of the Crown Post Office to an in-store franchise is likely to have a detrimental effect upon the viability of the upper part of Lewes High Street, (which it has already noted to be vulnerable within planning documents), and of many local businesses which depend upon it to send out many packages and parcels every day (the rise of internet shopping and working from home makes this ever more important). It notes the reduction in range of services that franchising brings about and the value that having these services within the town has to residents.

It further notes that a petition against the plans has gathered a large number of signatures, over 1000 in the first 48 hours of the petition, showing sizeable public opposition to franchising proposals being put forward by Post Office Ltd.

The council therefore resolves to publicly announce that it supports the efforts of local residents to keep a Crown Post Office in Lewes and opposes any proposals to downgrade it and lessen the service available to our residents. It asks the leader of the council and the chief executive to write to the Communications and Corporate Affairs Team at Post office Ltd outlining the damaging effects upon Lewes residents and businesses of these proposals and requesting that the Crown post office be retained in its current form at its current location.

NOTES

On January 19th Post Office Ltd announced plans to franchise 39 of its branches, and close three. Lewes Post Office is on the list of those to be franchised once a suitable retailer is found. Lewes is a busy Post Office - customers are well aware of the queues frequently experienced at peak times. Yet the Post Office wants to sell the valuable building and put the Lewes PO into a local shop, which will lead to longer queues, less services offered, and an all round inferior service, which will affect businesses and individual customers. Lewes Post Office has been on the same site for over 100 years - a site that serves the town well. The process is out to consultation at the moment but the consultation is mainly focused on finding another business to take on the service rather than dealing with the issue of whether the post office should stay at its current location.”