

Network Housing Group

Making Open Data Real **Consultation Response**

Network Housing Group owns and manages 17,000 homes, mostly in Greater London and the Eastern Region, working with 33 local authorities to provide a range of housing and support services delivered through its locally based housing associations.

The Group is committed to providing good quality homes, with a variety of tenures, to meet customer aspirations. It is also committed to supporting and investing in communities and to developing thriving neighbourhoods. The Group places its tenants and customers at the heart of everything it does and is proud of involving them in its operations.

Network supports the UK government for seeking to increase the availability of open data. As a Registered Provider, Network already provides extensive and publically available information in the following ways:

- Our regulator collects and stores a lot of key data from social housing providers about the homes we own and manage; the lettings and sales we undertake; and our key expenditure. Most information is sourced from the following publically available datasets:
 - [CORE](#) (Continuous Recording of lettings and sales in social housing in England)
 - [RSR](#) (Regulatory and Statistical Return)
 - [NROSH](#) (National Register of Social Housing)
 - [Performance Indicators](#)
- We are commissioned by the Homes and Communities Agency for the development and provision of affordable housing. We are contractually committed to provide data under the transparency provisions of the Framework Delivery Agreement with the Homes and Communities Agency.
- Data filed with the Charities Commission, published in our Annual Report to residents, published in our Annual Report & Financial Statements and published on our website.
- Public data to help residents find a home or move to another property; for example choice-based lettings, Homeswapper, local authority mutual exchanges and other schemes.

We support in principle the voluntary publication of information and the desire of the government for transparency. However we are keen to ensure this is balanced against the financial costs of compliance. Extending the FOI act to cover RPs will lead to an increase in the cost of doing business at a time the government and regulator are keen to see Registered Providers manage their assets and operations efficiently in order to contribute more to the development of new affordable housing.

We also believe the consultation paper is a step too far in the direction of classifying Registered Providers as public sector bodies. This is clear from the proposed definition of public service:

“Where we refer to Public Services, we mean public bodies, and those funded commissioned, or entrusted by Parliament to deliver a service”.

This definition is different to other government definitions of public service, including those published by ONS, CLG and HM Treasury. Widely accepted definitions of public body status refer to “business and industries that are owned or controlled by government”. Holding providers to account clearly constitutes control by government. This will also have the unwanted outcome that the sector’s private borrowings (circa £70 billion) would become part of the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement (PSBR).

We strongly urge that you both reconsider your definition of public bodies and make it very clear that these proposals do not include the housing association sector, which are independent bodies, and not public sector organisations.