

29<sup>th</sup> September 2015



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Leader of the Council

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### **Voluntary Right to Buy extension**

In common with most local authorities, LB Camden was very disappointed to hear that the National Housing Federation (NHF) had done a 'deal' with the Government under which housing associations would voluntarily introduce Right to Buy (RTB) for their tenants in order to avoid legislation being enacted to deliver this.

I am therefore writing to LB Camden's major housing association strategic partners to urge you to reject this deal in the 'vote' that is taking place this week and to instead stand side-by-side with local authorities in opposing the attacks that this government is mounting on the social housing sector.

The NHF's proposal document suggests that the extension will be funded by 'Government'. To be absolutely clear what this really means, Councils like Camden are being forced to sell our high value property to fund this. In Camden this means close to 40% of our homes that become vacant will be sold each year. This will exacerbate the housing crisis, not solve it.

It is clear that Government has not thought through the consequences of the RTB and other related housing policies. They are in a fix and are using your sector as political pawns to get them out of a difficult situation by imposing an unworkable timescale on the sector which allows for minimum consultation with relevant stakeholders.

It is also clear that the timetable is designed solely for political ends, in attempting to force resolution on the eve of the Conservative Party's annual political conference. Moreover, it's likely that the deal is being offered because government is concerned that it may not be able to get legislation through both houses of parliament.

I was disappointed to see it reported in *Inside Housing* that 'the vast majority, if not all, of the sector's largest landlords will support the NHF's proposal in the ballot, with many confirming this intention to the NHF before the vote'.

Many local authorities and housing associations have a long history of working in partnership to deliver social housing for our communities. As Sir Steve Bullock, London Councils' Executive Member for Housing and Mayor of Lewisham, has said, the short deadline for agreeing this deal has not given councils or housing associations enough time to consider the implications of a "major change of approach for our partnerships". It is clearly designed to drive a wedge in our working relationships and undermine the future of social housing provision in all its forms.

London Councils has called for the RTB vote to, at the very least, be paused while tripartite discussions take place between government, local authorities and housing associations about the content of the legislation. Together, local authorities and housing associations can get a better deal for the social housing sector than is being proposed by the NHF. If housing associations sign up to the NHF proposal, they will have succumbed to the government's divide and rule approach and done irreparable damage to their future relationship with local authorities.

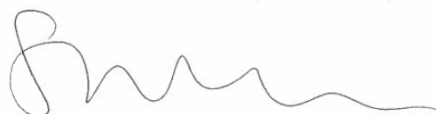
For all these reasons we should not be divided by the Government's politics, we should stay united to resist the changes and to work meaningfully together to solve the country's housing crisis – and not just for social renters, but for those struggling in the private rented sector and who can't afford to buy as well.

I regrettably feel that Camden will have to reconsider our strategic relationship with housing associations that voluntarily sign up to this deal. Before any proposal is adopted there must be proper consultation, parliamentary scrutiny and discussion of alternative courses of action that safeguard both housing association and council housing stock, now and for future generations – just as many of your founders envisaged. I therefore urge you to reject the NHF deal and to work alongside LB Camden and other local authorities to defend both council and housing association housing.

Many of you have said that the Conservative Government is holding a gun to your heads. If that's true, it's no way to do business. Local authorities can, and are, offering genuine partnership. Please walk away from this 'deal'.

Best wishes,

Sarah

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sarah Hayward', with a wavy underline.

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