



Long-term Delivery of Social and Affordable Rented Housing

- Written Evidence submitted by the Almshouse Association

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. Almshouses are the most established form of community run affordable housing in the country, having been offering homes for a thousand years. Almshouse charities are constantly looking to expand to meet the growing numbers of those in housing need.
- 1.2. A number of almshouse charities are not considered by local authorities as affordable housing providers when trying to build additional affordable social housing for people in need. This has a negative effect on the Government's overall housebuilding targets as;
 - Fewer affordable homes are being built than otherwise would.
 - The time taken to build affordable homes is increased.

2. Introduction

2.1. Almshouse Charities

- 2.1.1. Almshouse charities are the oldest form of charitable institution in the United Kingdom and have successfully provided their unique model of affordable social housing for over a thousand years.
- 2.1.2. There are around 1700 Almshouse charities providing homes for 35,000 residents making them collectively one of the largest specialist providers of affordable social housing. Despite the large numbers housed, 80% of almshouse charities provide less than 20 homes.
- 2.1.3. Almshouse charities differ from other providers of housing as they;
 - a. Charge a maintenance contribution for the upkeep of the property rather than rent.
 - b. Appoint residents as beneficiaries of the charity rather than on a short term tenancy.
 - c. Hold their housing stock in perpetuity.
- 2.1.4. Almshouse charities are regulated by the Charity Commission with approximately 25% being additionally regulated by the Regulator of Social Housing, as a consequence of receiving government funding.
- 2.1.5. There is growing evidence that the almshouse model of enduring affordable community housing does much more than just provide housing. Contributing to:
 - a. improved wellbeing
 - b. decreased loneliness
 - c. improved mental health
- 2.1.6. This conclusion has been initially supported by the [Whiteley Foundation for Ageing Well](#) and the Almshouse Association has commissioned further research that we would be happy to share when available.

2.2. The Almshouse Association

- 2.2.1. The Almshouse Association advises and assists almshouse charities to enable them to better serve their charitable objectives which is providing good quality housing for those in need.
- 2.2.2. In addition, we promote the almshouse movement, making government (both local and national), stakeholders and the public aware of the value of almshouses and increasing support for existing and new almshouses.

3. How can the Government ensure the sustainable delivery of social and affordable rented housing to meet long-term need and contribute to the Government's overall housebuilding targets?

3.1. Sustainable delivery is not just about ensuring that funding is available but that the planning system is adaptable and flexible to allow all providers to contribute to long term delivery of social and affordable housing.

3.2. Whilst almshouse charities may not be the only answer to meet long term need, it can provide an exemplar model of community led affordable housing, either through individual almshouse charities or in conjunction with other partners. However the planning system currently hinders almshouse charities in developing affordable housing.

3.3. Some planning authorities interpret the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) definition of 'affordable housing' to mean that an almshouse charity which is not a Registered Provider should be treated as if it were not a provider of 'affordable housing' for s106 purposes for s.106 Town and Country Planning Act 1990 purposes.

3.4. Accordingly, the planning authority:

- Requires an almshouse charity to carry out s.106 obligations where the charity itself is developing new almshouse dwellings. For example, the charity might be required to make a financial contribution towards community infrastructure or 'affordable housing'. This approach is paradoxical, since the dwellings which the charity is developing are themselves within the statutory definition of 'social housing' in the Housing and Regeneration Act.
- Maintains that a private developer cannot fulfil a s.106 obligation to provide 'affordable housing' by building almshouses for an almshouse charity.

3.5. This inconsistent practice leads to fewer almshouses being built than might otherwise be the case and even when a planning authority does finally concede that an almshouse charity is a recognised form of affordable housing, typically the planning process can take an extended length of time and add cost to the project. These factors are counter-productive and work against the desire of the Government to boost, not only housing supply, but the speed that housing is delivered.

4. Conclusion

In order to encourage more almshouse charities to build more affordable homes and encourage investment in housing from non-government funds, all almshouse charities should be regarded as affordable housing for planning purposes.

This can be achieved by Government making it clear in planning policy that almshouse charities are a recognised form of affordable housing.