Shaping Voluntary Right to Buy – summary of the ninth meeting of the Sounding Board

The National Housing Federation chaired the ninth meeting of the Voluntary Right to Buy (VRTB) Sounding Board on 14 March 2017, consisting of the Federation, the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG), the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), the Housing Ombudsman, and members from a range of housing associations reflecting the diversity of the sector in terms of type, size and operating markets.

The board engaged in discussion about the new regional pilot, the VRTB guidance, the implications of the VRTB for providers and tenants of supported and sheltered housing and proposals for the continuation of the VRTB Sounding Board.

Regional pilot
In the Autumn Statement the Chancellor announced £200m of funding for a regional pilot of the VRTB scheme. This pilot will last for one year and will test two critical pillars of the original agreement that weren’t tested in the original pilot, one for one replacement and portability. The new pilot will also test the application of the VRTB guidance.

DCLG provided an update on their current thinking around the location and timeframe for the pilot. The group discussed some of the areas where there may be opportunity for housing associations to collaborate to deliver the pilot, for example to manage the application process or to make properties available for tenants to port to.

The board also discussed some of the key learning from the original pilot, for example around the time required to progress different parts of the application process, and how this learning could inform the development of the regional pilot.

Decisions about the pilot, including what region it will take place in and the eligibility criteria, will be made by the Government.

VRTB guidance
The board reviewed the draft VRTB guidance for the regional pilot and provided feedback on some of the suggested timescales for certain aspects of the application process.

Supported and sheltered housing task and finish group
The board received an update on the work of the supported and sheltered housing task and finish group that was set up to consider how VRTB will particularly affect providers and tenants of supported and sheltered housing.

The task and finish group highlighted the importance of considering and acting on any safeguarding concerns that arise and suggested some areas where it may be useful to produce best practice guidance, for example around the management of mixed tenure schemes. The task and finish group also emphasised the importance of focusing on the
experience of providers and tenants of supported and sheltered housing as part of any research or evaluation that is carried out for the regional pilot.

**Future of the VRTB Sounding Board**

Ruth Davison, the Chair of the Sounding Board, thanked everyone for their contribution to shaping the VRTB policy and scheme design. The Sounding Board will continue to meet over the course of the regional pilot to ensure that learning from the regional pilot is effectively incorporated into the design of the main scheme.

The membership of the board will be reviewed to ensure the board includes representatives from the original Sounding Board, the original pilot and the new regional pilot.