Shaping Voluntary Right to Buy – note of the first meeting of the Sounding Board

The National Housing Federation chaired the first meeting of the Voluntary Right to Buy (VRTB) Sounding Board on 15 December 2015, consisting of the Federation, Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), the Homes and Communities Agency, and members from a range of housing associations, reflecting the diversity of the sector in terms of type, size and operating markets.

The terms of reference were agreed, under which the Sounding Board will act as the key advisory forum to shape ongoing government and Federation discussions, and will make recommendations to senior officials and ministers about the effective implementation of VRTB. The Sounding Board will be supported by a range of working groups and workshops, to allow for views to be input widely from the sector.

The Sounding Board agreed, and engaged in preliminary discussions about, a key set of implementation themes, including:

- The application and sales process/customer interface, including the discount payment process, building in anti-fraud measures, and any appeals process.
- National one for one replacement of homes sold; particularly how to ensure timely replacement, what this means in low market value areas, the repayment of the discount, and links to the affordable homes programme.
- When the portable discount will apply and the operation of the portable discount, with particular attention to how associations identify an alternative property and ensure there is a suitable supply of properties.
- The interaction with the preserved right to buy, and existing stock transfer agreements.
- The implications for the charitable objectives of housing associations.
- Section 106 and restrictions on the sale of properties.
- Engagement with local authorities.
- Regulation and the home ownership criteria.
- Issues relevant to specific groups of housing associations and appropriate mechanisms to engage those groups in the discussion about implementation.
- Communications – to create a clear policy for customers and stakeholders.
- Rural issues.
- The links to shared ownership.

It was agreed that the next meeting on 1 February would focus on more in-depth discussions on the VRTB pilots and the portable discount. It would also receive an update from the application and sales working group and review its forward work plan.