

Competence and Conduct – a direction or direction-less?

So the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government has finally brought its direction to the Regulator for the Competence and Conduct Standard to a limp conclusion. As the national tenant-led organisation that perhaps has the most knowledge in the country about tackling stigma – we want to make it absolutely clear that the MHCLG's somewhat desperate claim that the standard will tackle stigma is adding insult to injury. It will certainly make no contribution to delivering post Grenfell commitments made to tenants about tackling stigma.

Back in 2018, the then MHCLG stated clearly in the *A New Deal for Social Housing* green paper that stigma was “the most consistent theme raised by residents”. The MHCLG took on the responsibility to “begin to tackle the stigma which for too long has been associated with social housing”, making tackling stigma one of the five central principles for social housing's *New Deal*.

Was this the last time the MHCLG demonstrated such humility, candour and integrity? By the time the subsequent White Paper emerged, references to tackling stigma had all but disappeared into the box marked too difficult, occasionally to be trotted out to suit the Government of the day.

The MHCLG seem to be surprised that tenants can possibly be complaining. We've now told your landlords that they should provide you with a home that is safe and healthy. We've made a Regulator who takes an interest in the services you receive. Now we've even told landlords to employ people with basic skills. What more could you possibly want? After all – you're just social housing tenants. You should be grateful that you have a home at all.

What is it that is so difficult for the MHCLG to get? Is it not clear that there is a cultural, attitudinal and behavioural problem that resulted in some landlords, (some of them with highly qualified, experienced staff), thinking it was OK to provide homes that were not safe and healthy?

Is it not clear that there is a cultural, attitudinal and behavioural problem that resulted in some landlords thinking it was OK to not bother about

tenant services when there wasn't a Regulator telling them off if they didn't?

Is it not clear that there is a cultural, attitudinal and behavioural problem that resulting in some landlords thinking it was OK to not employ staff with the skills to do the job?

Is it not clear that behind all of this are the cultural, attitudinal and behavioural problems that are the root cause of all the problems? And that this is what sits behind tenants feeling like the second-class citizens they told you they felt like post Grenfell? If it really isn't clear – then perhaps the MHCLG needs to reflect on its own Competence and Conduct Standards.

So MHCLG - what is your direction now – your vision? All the things being implemented now were the previous administration's ideas. We heard from politicians in the current administration who used to live in social housing about the need to tackle social housing stigma, but what is the new administration doing?

The sad thing is that we told the MHCLG well in advance that the plans for the Direction we have waited so long for won't work - putting letters after people's names will not contribute to tackling stigma. Of course, it's good that people providing services to tenants have some basic skills, but there were people at Grenfell and in Rochdale who had letters after their names. No amount of tinkering around in a classroom is going to change people's culture, attitudes or behaviours.

It's sadder still that we even suggested a range of ideas regarding how the Government could take action to genuinely start tackling stigma, but the MHCLG chose not to even bother to talk to us about our ideas. The attitude comes across as – they're just tenants – what the hell do they know?

Tenants are not stupid. We know the MHCLG made commitments to us back in 2018 which haven't been kept. We know that we still feel like the underclass. We know that the MHCLG has done nothing to tackle stigma yet. We see the gap between *empowering tenants* rhetoric and the MHCLG constantly containing, constraining or ignoring tenant aspirations. We see how, when it comes to things that the Government and landlords want, such as Rent Convergence, it can be hammered through that easily, whilst when it comes to what tenants want, such as tackling stigma or re-

establishing a National Tenant Voice, it's just years of faff. We're not stupid, we can tell when it's all about stalling, delaying and obfuscating.

If the MHCLG is making tenants pay for other people to have qualifications, the least it could do is require those people to evidence that they are taking active steps to tackle the stigma that tenants face every day. And if tenants are telling the MHCLG that what is being done is not good enough and won't work, then perhaps they should stop, listen, hear and act on the advice from the real experts ... the tenants who this is supposed to be all about.

The sector and landlords do not have votes. In the absence of the MHCLG doing anything to address tenant concerns – is it any wonder that tenants might turn to other politicians who tell them that they are going to do things differently?

Lynne Brosnan – Chair Stop Social Housing Stigma