

The Rt Hon Esther McVey MP
Minister of State for Housing and Planning
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Tuesday, 27 August 2019

Dear Ms McVey

Re: The Importance of Supported Housing for those with learning disabilities and long terms support needs

Please accept our congratulations on your appointment.

We are writing to you to coincide with the National Housing Federation's 'Starts at Home Day' on 30th August; a day dedicated to celebrating the contribution of supported housing across the UK.

At a time when the social care crisis is high profile, the discussion focuses mainly on older people. The signatories of this letter represent a much smaller group of people, mainly those with learning disabilities or autism but also including individuals with mental health-related support needs or physical disabilities; people who need the support of social care for their whole lives.

The Learning Disability Housing Network is a group of housing associations with varying interests and portfolios but all with a role in providing supported living accommodation. Together, we provide more than 7,000 tenancies of this type in all areas of England. As a group, we also reach into many other networks of housing providers and charities working hard to build an infrastructure for people with long-term support needs.

Supported housing provides the opportunity for people to live in communities, enabling independence, and also makes savings to the public purse compared to traditional care home and hospital provision. High profile media attention has shone a light on the potential abuses of institutional care. It is therefore disturbing that, so many years after the Winterbourne scandal, 2,500 people with learning disabilities are still living in hospital accommodation.

Sadly, in the last year this specialist sector of housing has been high profile for the wrong reasons. Investment firms have aggressively entered the market and a number of mostly new, smaller housing providers have caught the attention of the Regulator of Social Housing and trade press because of their association with these financial backers. There is a perception forming that Housing Benefit payments are being inflated and quality

compromised. We are really concerned that such negative messages relating to just a few organisations could undermine the great work which many housing providers do every day for some of the most vulnerable in society.

As Housing Minister, many people will lobby you over the need for general needs housing supply but it is easy for the most marginalised to get lost in big numbers. We are very hopeful that your background, in DWP and as a Minister representing disabled people, will give you an excellent perspective on the issues we raise. We know that, as a former journalist and media presenter, you will understand that sometimes negative messages drown out good news – and specialist supported housing is almost always good news: it provides people with better lives at a lower cost to the public purse.

We therefore call on you to be an advocate for the people we represent. Relatively small amounts of grant funding - well managed - could make a huge difference to this sector. Aggressive investors only flourish because access to capital is difficult. The support of well-informed advocates, such as yourself, can change the rhetoric. You can absolutely help us make a difference to the lives of people with complex disabilities, who need support.

We would be keen to meet with you and/or your team to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely

Care Housing, Golden Lane Housing, Progress Housing Group, Reside Housing, Riverside

<https://startsathome.org.uk/>

CC Kate Henderson, CEO, National Housing Federation