

CWAG Alternative General Meeting - Feedback

One consequence Covid19 has been the cancellation of the regular programme of CWAG General Meetings. This has provided an opportunity to explore alternative on-line meeting options and over the past three Fridays CWAG has hosted a series of shorter virtual meetings via Teams on the theme of **Recovering from the Covid19 shutdown**.

The first session focussed on the **homelessness and rough sleeping response to the pandemic** and included case studies from [Manchester](#) and [Cornwall](#) on their respective experiences of responding to the challenges of the 'Everyone in' scheme.

Michael Brookes from MHCLG outlined the Governments Covid19 response to homelessness and rough sleeping which involves expanding and accelerating existing RSI programmes to deliver 6000 new supported homes. The initiative includes a new Rough Sleeping Covid19 Task force led by Dame Louise Casey and an additional £160m allocated this year, specifically targeted at providing safe long-term accommodation for rough sleepers taken off the streets during the pandemic.

Discussion focussed on the challenge of translating the success of the 'Everyone in' programme into long-term housing solutions. Priya Thethi from the LGA discussed the recently published Local Partnerships briefing '[Housing people who were rough sleeping and those at risk who have been accommodated due to Covid19](#)' which sets out options for sourcing accommodation and support.

The second Teams meeting considered **development progress issues and the Right to Buy (RTB)** and the potential for council new build to contribute to economic recovery.

The meeting coincided with the publication of the LGA paper '[Delivery of council housing – Developing a stimulus package post pandemic](#)' setting out the arguments for building new social housing to deliver wider economic and social benefits.

In his [presentation on the RTB](#), David Enticott from Derby Homes put forward persuasive arguments for a sustainable RTB scheme based on more realistic discounts and greater flexibility in the use of receipts. He argued that a reformed RTB, which addresses current disincentives to new investment by councils, could have a key role in the post-Covid19 recovery.

The final session looked at **the impact of the pandemic on housing management** and included case studies from Newcastle and South Tyneside. Lisa Birchall from the National Federation of ALMOs also gave feedback from the ALMOs perspective and the findings from the most recent ARCH/ NFA Universal Credit survey.

The emerging picture is one of widely differing impacts around the country with some areas reporting major challenges, including significant rent arrears and the risk of not balancing the HRA at the end of the financial year.

The discussion highlighted the innovative and creative ways landlords have responded to the challenges of the pandemic. There are many examples of how quickly landlords have mobilised to deliver initiatives that previously progressed at 'snail's pace'. Comments demonstrated that this has been a dynamic period for housing, reinvigorating the sector and highlighting the fundamental importance of the home to individual and community well-being.

It is too early at this stage to think in terms of what the 'new normal' emerging from the pandemic. There have been some gains in terms of flexibility and creativity to deliver services in a new ways, however this also needs to be weighed against what is lost by not being in physically proximity.

Presentations from the meeting can be accessed [here](#).

We are very keen to receive feedback from anyone who dialled into the meetings as well as views on using Teams for further CWAG meetings going forward.