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Patron: Her Majesty The Queen
President: The Most Reverend &
Right Honourable
Dr. John Sentamu

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Department for Communities and Local Government
Zone 1/G9, Eland House,
Bressenden Place,
London SW1E 5DU

23rd July 2012

Dear Mr Bentham,

YMCA England's response to the Department for Communities and Local Government's consultation on 'Suitability of accommodation to end the main homelessness duty'.

The YMCA is the largest voluntary sector provider of safe, supported accommodation for single men and women aged between 16-30 years old, with over 9,000 young people every night staying in YMCA accommodation. The YMCA was established in 1844 and there are 121 YMCAs across England serving over 530 different communities.

Following the publication of the Department for Communities and Local Government's consultation, the YMCA national body, YMCA England, carried out a consultation of the 121 YMCAs across England on the suitability of the order. Their comments and feedback form the basis of the response.

Question 1: Do you agree that these five areas should be important in determining whether accommodation is to be regarded as not suitable?

When deciding what suitable accommodation is in the private rented sector these five areas are sensible minimum standards for how a property should be regarded. There is however a need for the overall five areas to be strengthened through the inspection of the property before being occupied by the tenant.

Currently the guidance only says that they would **expect** "...that a local authority office, or a person acting on behalf such as a letting agent, would visit the property" in order to assess if it was in a reasonably condition. YMCA believes that under certain time constraints and pressures, local authorities may not have the time or resources to check individual properties which may result in people being



housed in unsuitable accommodation. In order to mitigate this the guidance should be made stronger.

The suitability order is particularly weak around the question of landlord behaviour. Private rented sector landlords should be subject to rigorous checks including compulsory CRBs –self certification is inadequate in order to protect vulnerable people and children.

Question 2: What else should be considered when determining whether a private rented sector property is suitable for the discharge of homelessness duty?

When determining whether a private rented sector property is suitable for the discharge of homelessness duty, other areas such as water testing, proficiency of the repairs processes and compliance with an asbestos register should also be given consideration when determining what is suitable. This is especially important when housing potentially vulnerable people and children.

Alongside determining what is a suitable property there should also be safeguards in place for tenants after they have been housed. A clear appeals process for tenants to use should a property not be fully assessed and subsequently prove to be unsuitable should be implemented. As previously stated, it is anticipated that local authorities may in unusual circumstances house someone without properly assessing the suitability of the home. Therefore it would be in the best interests of the tenants to have the ability to dispute the suitability of the privately rented sector housing if they deemed it unsatisfactory.

Question 3: Do you agree that the existing provisions on location and suitability should be strengthened so that homeless households are placed nearer to home wherever possible?

There is a need for local authorities to be able to balance where they are able to provide accommodation within their own boroughs and where they may need to house people in another. The paper states that “the Government considers that it is not acceptable for local authorities to make compulsory placements automatically hundreds of miles away, without having proper regard for the disruption this may cause to those households.” However YMCA believes the use of the word “automatically” is not a strong enough deterrent to stop local authorities from compulsorily moving those in need of housing great distances, when under increased pressures.

This would be strengthened further if it were stated that the expectation is that people will be placed in a location close to their current one in cases where it is possible. Out of borough placements should only occur where no suitable alternative can be found.



What is not clear from the order paper is whether if a tenant turns down a property which they believe is “hundreds of miles” away, has the local authority discharged their duty? Or are they still bound to offer more accommodation which the tenant believes to be suitable?

Question 4: Do you agree that regulations should specify the factors in relation to location which authorities should take into account when considering the suitability of accommodation?

YMCA does agree that regulations should specify the factors in relation to location but it should also be made clearer that an out of borough placement is not suitable if it is assessed that it will have a negative impact on a vulnerable adult or child.

Yours sincerely,



Ian Green
Chief Executive

