



Housing mobility schemes

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This note gives a brief history of housing mobility schemes and policy developments in this area.

Housing mobility schemes enable local authority and housing association tenants to relocate from their current area to other parts of the country. A number of schemes have operated over the years – including the Housing and Mobility Exchange Service (HOMES), and the LAWN and Seaside and Country Homes schemes. Between 2004 and 2007, the contract for these schemes was let to Scout Solutions Projects Ltd., operating under the brand name MoveUK. However, in September 2006, after citing concerns with the scheme's performance, the previous Government announced that it was to terminate Scout Solutions' contract. After a transitional period, the schemes were suspended with effect from January 2007.

Until the launch of *HomeSwap* Direct in October 2011 (fully operational from April 2012) there was no national mobility scheme in operation – a point of contention for some, who argued that the patchwork of provision lacked coherence.

Measures aimed at improving the mobility of social housing tenants were included in the *Localism Act 2011* which gained Royal Assent on 15 November 2011.

In September 2014 the Government consulted on the introduction of a new Right to Move for social housing tenants, the responses to which are being analysed.

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1 Housing mobility – the issue

Lack of housing mobility has been identified as a particular issue for tenants of social housing. These tenants often find it more difficult than those renting in the private sector to relocate for work, family or other reasons, because of the difficulty of securing suitable alternative housing in the social sector. Consequently, out-of-area mobility rates for tenants in social housing have traditionally been much lower than for tenants in other tenures.

The 2007 review of social housing carried out by Professor John Hills, *Ends and means: the future roles of social housing in England*, considered mobility in the social rented sector in some detail. Whilst stopping short of suggesting a causal relationship, the report explicitly connected low housing mobility for tenants of social housing with restricted employment prospects:

There may be factors connected with the way that we run social housing that have adverse effects on employment changes. The difficulties in moving within the sector may be one of these [...] The rationing system within social housing makes it very hard

to move home, but particularly between regions [...] and job-seeking or getting a job is rarely given high priority in local authority criteria for social housing allocations.

This can be seen in the limited distances that social tenants do travel if they move house [...] of those that had moved in the previous year in 2005-06, 70 per cent of the social tenants had moved less than 5 miles, compared to only 55 per cent of owners and private tenants. Only 7 per cent of social tenants who moved had moved more than 50 miles, compared to 15 per cent of private tenants.¹

National housing mobility schemes have sometimes been created as a method of tackling inter-regional imbalances in the demand and supply of social housing. Consequently, some have operated from the premise of encouraging movement from areas of high housing demand to those with proportionately more spare capacity.

2 Mobility schemes: a brief history

2.1 Mobility schemes before 2004

The Housing Organisations and Mobility Exchange Service – HOMES

In the early 1990s, the then Conservative Government oversaw the launch of Housing Organisations Mobility and Exchange Services (HOMES). This agency administered several housing mobility schemes – two key ones being the National Mobility Scheme and the Tenant Exchange Scheme (later renamed Homeswap). In order to participate in the National Mobility Scheme, tenants were required to meet certain criteria - for example being on a housing waiting list and having caring responsibilities in a different area of the country. If accepted, tenants were put forward or nominated for transfer to another region by their own local authority. The Tenants' Exchange Scheme was described as a 'self-help' scheme² and, as the name suggests, was based on the principle of exchange. Participants were required to consult lists maintained by housing departments, find other tenants interested in mutual exchange, and secure the agreement of the relevant landlords before completing any move.

The Seaside and Country Homes and LAWN schemes

The Seaside and Country Homes scheme, introduced in the 1990s, is aimed at local authority and social housing tenants aged 60 or over currently living in Greater London. Participants can apply to move to bungalows and flats throughout the south of England and the Midlands.

LAWN³ – also sometimes known as the *Out of London* Scheme – was similarly established to offer local authority and some housing association tenants⁴ in London opportunities to relocate to other parts of the country with lower housing demand. It was officially launched in July 2002 by the then Housing Minister, Lord Rooker. Unlike the Seaside and Country Homes scheme, there is no age limit. The scheme requires the referral of a landlord and is voluntary – therefore, not all London boroughs have participated. Some boroughs operate schemes with identical aims but different names.

Participants in LAWN or similar schemes may be entitled to:

¹ Hills, John (February 2007) *Ends and Means: the future role of social housing in England*, CASE report 34, pp106-7

² HOMES, Tenant information leaflet, *Do you want to move to another area?*

³ London Alliance West and North

⁴ Housing associations are required to have 'nomination rights' to the scheme; these are agreed between the association and the local authority.

- Help with the costs of viewing property in other areas
- Information on the locale
- Financial assistance with removal costs
- A relocation grant or other payment in respect of the London property they vacate.

2.2 Mobility schemes since 2004

In February 2004, following a Government review, the contract for running the HOMES/ Homeswap, LAWN and Seaside and Country Homes schemes was let to a private company, Scout Solutions UK Ltd. At the same time, the company was contracted to develop new software and an internet site to provide a link with Jobcentre Plus's Internet Job Bank, the intention being to create a 'one stop shop' for information about housing and employment. An Office of the Deputy Prime Minister press notice announcing the contract stated that the new service was expected to launch in February 2005.⁵ The then Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's five year plan of 2005, *Sustainable Communities: Homes for All*,⁶ confirmed that the schemes would operate under a new brand name – MoveUK.⁷

On 18 September 2006, the then Minister for Housing and Planning, Yvette Cooper, announced that the Government would be terminating Scout Solutions' contract due to concerns about the performance of the software developed by the company and delays in delivery.⁸ Scout Solutions continued to deliver the services for a transitional period; in January 2007, four months after the Government announced the end of the contract, the MoveUK 'brand' was closed down. An interim telephone advice service for customers of the Seaside and Country Homes and LAWN schemes was established until their re-launch in July 2007 on the "[housingmoves](#)" website.⁹ The Greater London Authority has administered these schemes since April 2011.¹⁰

Until the launch of *HomeSwap* Direct in October 2011 (see section 3.4 below) there was no national mobility scheme in operation – a point of contention for some, who argued that the patchwork of provision lacked coherence. In July 2007 the Labour Government announced that new applications for two of the former MoveUK schemes – Seaside and Country Homes and the LAWN scheme – would be accepted.

Some local authorities continued to offer advice or support on mutual exchange. Additionally, there were a number of independent exchange support services, some of which are free and some of which charge a nominal fee. Examples include:

- [Homeswapper](#) – operated by Scout Solutions but no longer a Government-funded service.
- [House Exchange](#) – a UK-wide database and forum

⁵ ODPM press notice 10 February 2004 *Helping social tenants get on the move*. ODPM was responsible for housing matters before the Department for Communities and Local Government took over in 2006.

⁶ ODPM (January 2005) *Sustainable Communities: Homes for All*, p 41

⁷ Previously the service had been known as the Housing and Employment Mobility Service (HEMS).

⁸ HC Debate 18 September 2006 c133ws

⁹ [housingmoves website](#)

¹⁰ HL Deb 29 November 2011 c48WA

- [Houseswap Forum](#) – a UK-wide database, restricted access for free, and option to pay for enhanced services
- [Under One Roof](#) – a UK-wide database, restricted access for free and with member support.

2.3 Choice-based letting as a means of promoting mobility

After the withdrawal of the MoveUK service, the previous Government emphasised the role of choice-based lettings schemes in promoting housing mobility for social housing tenants.

On 12 December 2007, Yvette Cooper announced a series of measures relating to social housing. Among these was £1.8 million of promised investment in 18 new sub-regional choice-based lettings schemes to offer people the opportunity to move across local authority boundaries.

During the Committee Stage of the *Housing and Regeneration Bill 2007-08*, Grant Shapps moved a new clause to place a duty on the Secretary of State to introduce a scheme to facilitate moves to and from the homes of social housing tenants in England and Wales.

In response, the then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Iain Wright, referred to research which found that most tenants wishing to move “want to do so locally, staying within five miles of their existing home, and enabling them to retain social and cultural ties.”¹¹ Pressed on the issue of whether the Government was giving a national scheme a high enough priority, the then Minister argued:

It is a major priority because a progressive Government should facilitate social mobility to ensure greater economic prosperity. This is absolutely key, and as I have said, the vast majority of moves will be local and sub-regional, but it is important [...] that for economic purposes we have that national scheme. [...] there is cross party consensus on this very important new issue [...].¹²

The motion was withdrawn.

2.4 Housing Corporation review

On 10 March 2008, the Housing Corporation¹³ announced that Campbell Tickell consultants had been appointed in conjunction with eight housing associations, the London boroughs and ten participating city councils to conduct a feasibility study into a national mobility scheme.¹⁴

The results of the Campbell Tickell research were published in November 2009 in: [Mobility Matters – exploring mobility aspirations and options for social housing residents](#). A level of demand for mobility in the social housing sector was identified:

The research among residents concluded that there is a level of demand for mobility that is currently not being met. Thirty seven per cent of residents in our sample of 1,280 said that they wanted to move, and of these 17 per cent said that they wanted to move a lot. While the majority of these residents said that

¹¹ HC Deb 31 January 2008 c695W

¹² HC Deb 31 January 2008 c699

¹³ The Corporation’s regulatory role was taken over by the Tenant Services Authority and its investment role taken over by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) on 1 December 2008. Subsequently the TSA’s regulatory role was passed over to a committee within the HCA.

¹⁴ Housing Corporation Statement 19/08 *National mobility scheme study announced*.

they wanted to remain within the same region (81 per cent), there was demand among some residents to move outside of their existing regions.

The report recommended the establishment of a pilot national mobility scheme.

3 The Housing Mobility Taskforce 2010

In Autumn 2009 Grant Shapps, as Conservative Shadow Housing Minister, asked the National Housing Federation to form a Mobility Taskforce to come up with ideas to improve the opportunities for social housing tenants to move. The report of the Taskforce was published in August 2010.¹⁵

The Taskforce found considerable pent up demand for moves amongst social housing tenants. The main reason cited for seeking a move was the desire for a larger home to meet the needs of expanding families. The report's recommendations focussed on creating opportunities for people to move by making the best use of existing homes by improving existing tenants' chances of moving through mutual exchanges (or swaps) and transfers. While recommendations on the supply of housing were beyond the Taskforce's brief, this did not prevent them from stressing the need for "supply-side" solutions:

Without more new homes being built the options open to existing tenants wanting to move and new applicants looking for social housing will remain very constrained. [...] We feel it is important to stress the need for supply-side solutions that deliver more affordable housing. In doing so, we recognise that local investment plans need to be based on the needs of existing tenants who aspire to move, as well as new applicants. We also recognise that social landlords need to build properties that meet the needs of households of different sizes and across the income spectrum of those who cannot afford to buy or privately rent suitable housing. This should include low cost home ownership homes, as well as those for social rent.¹⁶

The key recommendations of the Taskforce are summarised below.

Mutual exchange: The Taskforce supported increased opportunities for mutual exchange through landlords signing up to at least one mutual exchange service. Better publicity for mutual exchange services and improved sharing of information between these services was recommended so that all potential swaps across the UK could be viewed. *HomeSwap Direct* will achieve many of these aims (see section 4.4 below).

General Transfers: The Taskforce recommended that transfer applicants should not have to compete alongside new applicants for local authority housing. Provision for this has been made in the *Localism Act 2011* (section 4.5 below). The Taskforce emphasised the need for council landlords to take advantage of the flexibilities they have in devising their allocation schemes¹⁷ and the benefits of social landlords working together in partnership to meet local housing needs. There was encouragement for landlords to focus on how existing homes might be adapted (extended/knocked through to adjacent properties) to meet tenants' needs.

Reducing under-occupation: As noted above, the Taskforce recommended that transfer applicants should not have to compete alongside new applicants for local authority housing and measures in the *Localism Act* have achieved this. Tenants vacating under-occupied

¹⁵ NHF, *Report of the Mobility Taskforce*, 2010

¹⁶ *ibid*

¹⁷ Currently explained in DCLG, *Allocation of accommodation: Guidance for local housing authorities in England*, 2012 and *Providing social housing for local people*, December 2013

properties is seen as a way of creating “chain moves” to assist a number of households at once. In addition, the Taskforce called for social landlords to incentivise moves by offering attractive housing options and taking the “headache” out of the moving process. The Taskforce specifically recommended that the Government should “amend housing benefit rules so that under-occupiers who move can be assured that they will be eligible for housing benefit to cover the rent on a property with one spare bedroom.” This has not been acted upon (see section 4.5 below for information on the Government’s approach to Housing Benefit and under-occupation).

Access to adapted properties: A need for improved information on the properties/options available was identified. The Taskforce recommended that landlords should compile and share detailed information on their accessible/adapted properties and make this available when letting properties. Housing authorities and their partners should develop investment plans to meet the needs of existing tenants and new applicants. Social landlords should consider recycling aids and adaptations where new tenants do not need them.

Cross boundary transfers: The Taskforce called on social landlords to consider entering into cross party arrangements to set aside a proportion of properties coming up for lettings for people seeking to move from outside the local authority area from across the UK. It suggested that the Government should work with the Taskforce organisations and others to “explore whether pilots could be established to test what would incentivise housing authorities and social landlords to set aside a proportion of their lettings for people from outside their area.”

Moves from supported housing: To increase the opportunities for residents to move on from supported housing the Taskforce called for joint working/protocols between social landlords and support providers. It also recommended that consideration be given to the need to invest in housing suitable as move-on accommodation for more vulnerable residents.

4 The Government’s approach

4.1 Conservative Party Manifesto

The Conservative Party’s [2010 Manifesto](#) included a commitment to “pilot a new ‘right to move’ scheme and introduce a nationwide social home swap programme, so social tenants can transfer their tenancy to another home or part of the country.”

4.2 Consultation paper 2010

In a consultation paper published on 12 November 2010, [Local decisions: a fairer future for social housing](#), the Government set out its approach to improving mobility amongst tenants in social housing:

5.3 In paragraphs 4.18 to 4.22 we set out how we will make it easier for tenants to move within social housing, by taking most transferring tenants out of the allocation system, so that they no longer have to compete with new applicants on the waiting list. We also intend to ensure there is a social home swap programme which will mean that social tenants wishing to move by exchanging their tenancy with that of another household can maximise their chances of securing a suitable match. Efficient home swap arrangements should enable tenants seeking a move to have access to the complete list of other tenants similarly interested in an exchange.

5.4 We have therefore been working with existing providers of home swap services to develop a data sharing or data pooling approach. This would allow tenants seeking a mutual exchange to enter their details into the website of one provider and see details

of all potential swap properties registered with all other providers operating in the market.

5.5 We will take steps to put this data sharing/data pooling approach on a statutory basis and will legislate to grant the Secretary of State a power to direct the social housing regulator to issue a standard on mutual exchange. The standard would then require landlords (both local authority and housing associations) to subscribe to web-based home swap services which enable tenants to see the full range of properties available which match their search criteria across providers.¹⁸

A summary of responses was published in February 2011.¹⁹ On the issue of mobility the overview of responses stated:

Over 350 respondents commented on the proposal to implement a national home swap scheme. The majority of these were from landlords, some of whom, having consulted tenant panels, responded on behalf of their tenants as well. Most local authority respondents already subscribed to a mutual exchange service on behalf of their tenants and could see no good reason why others should not. In terms of additional support for tenants to effect an exchange, the majority of responses indicated that tenants would like additional support either to access web-based services or to receive information in other formats such as paper copies, a telephone helpline or face to face contact in the local housing office.

4.3 Localism Act 2011 – mutual exchange

Measures aimed at improving the mobility of social housing tenants are included in the *Localism Act* which gained Royal Assent on 15 November 2011.

Section 176 provides for the amendment of the *Housing and Regeneration Act 2008* to give the social housing regulator the power to set a standard for registered providers in respect of assisting tenants with regard to mutual exchanges. The Secretary of State has the power to issue directions to the regulator in regard to facilitating mutual exchanges.

Proposed new regulations on mutual exchange were included in the consultation *Implementing social housing reform: directions to the social housing regulator* which closed on 29 September 2011. The final directions to the Social Housing Regulator were issued in November 2011 – the content and responses to the directions are considered in section **4.4** (below).

Section 177 creates a new class of “permitted payments” in section 122 of the *Housing and Regeneration Act 2008* to enable tenants who are shareholders of their landlord organisation to benefit from payments which assist tenants to move out of their social rented property into owner occupation of another dwelling. A number of housing association residents are also members (shareholders) of their landlord organisation and thus have not been able to benefit from incentive schemes to move into owner occupation as the making of “gifts” (including incentive payments) to tenant members or former members was precluded.

Section 176 (then Clause 148) was debated in Public Bill Committee on 8 March 2011.²⁰

¹⁸ CLG, *Local decisions: a fairer future for social housing*, November 2010, paras 5.3-5

¹⁹ CLG *Local decisions: next steps towards a fairer future for social housing. Summary of responses to consultation*, February 2011, para 2.6.

²⁰ PBC Deb 8 March 2011 cc873-6

Shadow Housing Minister, Alison Seabeck said: “We broadly welcome any move that will help tenants who wish to move to do so” but raised concerns about the possibility of the Mayor of London establishing a duplicate scheme.

Andrew Stunell, then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, acknowledged the Committee’s broad agreement to the proposed scheme and spoke of its intended effect:

...it is a modest improvement; we do not expect it to have a dramatic impact, but it will have a real impact which will improve the lives of a good number of social tenants throughout the country.

He said that the national scheme would enhance any local scheme, whether in London or elsewhere; that there had not yet been any formal discussions between the Mayor and the Department on the issue and that the two schemes would not conflict but would provide complementary opportunities for tenants to find suitable accommodation.

The measures aimed at improving the mobility of social housing tenants were also welcomed outside of Parliament. The Chartered Institute of Housing said “a national mobility scheme can be helpful and should look to build on the success of existing schemes.”²¹ The London Tenants Federation supports the facility for tenants to be able to move to smaller or larger homes in their locality or to move nearer to work or family – the Federation regards a national home-swap scheme as “a sensible idea.” However the Federation also emphasised the general desire for additional local housing to enable tenants to remain in their locality as circumstances change, as opposed to the promotion of schemes to move them away from their communities.²²

4.4 HomeSwap Direct

The then Housing Minister, Grant Shapps, launched *HomeSwap* Direct on 27 October 2011. This online scheme allows social housing tenants who want to swap their home the opportunity to see available properties nationwide:

From April 2012 all social landlords will be required to make properties from across the UK available to tenants looking to swap their home,²³ giving them the opportunity to move anywhere in the UK – including Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.²⁴

The press release advised:

- *HomeSwap* Direct brings together four internet-based providers of mutual exchange services (HomeSwapper, House Exchange, Abrisas and LHS (Locata)) to offer tenants more choice over where they live.
- A membership agreement which has been developed by Government and joined by these providers is at the annex and will be published on their websites. This sets out the framework under which information will be shared by providers, the technical requirements of the scheme and the processes by which new members can apply to join.

²¹ CIH, *Briefing on Social Housing Reform – Local decisions: a fairer future for social housing*, November 2010

²² London Tenants Federation, *Briefing on Local decisions: a fairer future for social housing*, November 2010

²³ This requirement derives from the new provisions in the *Localism Act 2011*

²⁴ DCLG Press Release, 27 October 2011

- Proposed new regulations on mutual exchange were included in the consultation Implementing social housing reform: directions to the social housing regulator which closed on 29 September. The proposed direction would require social landlords to ensure their tenants have free access to web-based home-swap services and to subscribe to providers who are part of the national scheme. Final directions to the Regulator will be published later in the autumn.²⁵
- In addition, up to £1 million will be provided to 12 local authority led Mobility demonstration projects who will be testing innovative and cost-effective ways of supporting mobility. Projects include exploring the savings to landlords of tenants moving through mutual exchange rather than a transfer; exploring whether greater mobility can reduce health and social care costs; and investigating the types of support - such as helplines, or dedicated staff - which can best help tenants through the process of moving.

The participating landlords are:

Bracknell Forest

Devon

Doncaster

Herts Choice Homes

Kent Homechoice

Kettering

Leeds

Northampton

Northumberland

Salford

West London Housing Partnership

Worcestershire and Stratford

The Government was asked about interest in and use of the scheme:

Stephen Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many people have (a) visited the HomeSwap Direct website and (b) moved home through using HomeSwap Direct in each month since April 2012.

Kris Hopkins: HomeSwap Direct, the national home swap scheme, was launched in October 2011 to increase opportunities for tenants who wish to move home through a mutual exchange by allowing them to see details of every available property. The scheme has operated very successfully since its launch, with tenants carrying out over 10 million searches of the property data held on HomeSwap Direct.

Details of the number of moves that have taken place under the HomeSwap Direct scheme in England are not held centrally.²⁶

²⁵ The final directions were issued in November 2011.

²⁶ HC Deb 27 November 2013, 571 c335W

Updated guidance

In February 2014 the then Minister for Housing, Kris Hopkins, reaffirmed the Government's commitment to mobility in social housing and announced new guidance:

'The government has made it easier for tenants to view available properties online, and landlords across the country are already demonstrating that more can be done to help tenants swap homes. I now want all social landlords to follow their best practice, and ensure tenants who want to move have the opportunity to do so.'²⁷

The new guidance²⁸ (based on findings from research in 12 local authorities or local authority partnerships²⁹) identified seven key steps that local authorities and social landlords can take:

- Make the case for mutual exchange
- Take a partnership approach
- Raise tenant awareness and understanding
- Minimise the costs and simplify the process
- Support tenants to find a match and secure a move
- Commit staff time and resources
- Ensure mutual exchange is a viable and attractive proposition

As noted in section 4.3, in July 2011 the Government published a consultation paper on draft directions to the Social Housing Regulator. Responses were published in November 2011.

The majority of respondents indicated that they agreed with the proposed direction on mutual exchange but around one fifth of respondents indicated that they did not agree with the proposed approach:

The majority of these felt that the direction was over-prescriptive and bureaucratic, and that registered providers should be free to determine locally what mobility services they put in place for their tenants. A small number of providers also questioned why there was a requirement to subscribe to a national service which did not currently exist.

[...]

Around one fifth of landlords questioned the financial burden of complying with the direction. Some expressed concerns about the resources required to support tenants who do not have access to the internet, and requested clarification on what would be considered a "reasonable" level of service in this context. Others, particularly smaller landlords, believed that the direction would require them to pay an up-front subscription to an online mutual exchange scheme which would not offer value for money. In addition, a small number of landlords also expressed concern that they would be required to purchase expensive new IT equipment, or upgrade their existing services, to ensure that they met the terms of the direction.

²⁷ [Landlords should offer more efficient mutual home exchange, says Hopkins](#), Inside Housing, 11 February 2014

²⁸ DCLG, [Promoting mobility through mutual exchange: realising the potential](#), 10 February 2014

²⁹ DCLG, [Promoting mobility through mutual exchange. Learning lessons from the housing mobility demonstration projects](#), February 2014

A number of respondents expressed concern that the proposed tenure reforms, particularly in relation to the affordable rent model, could reduce the number of social tenants who want to pursue a mutual exchange. The Localism Act ensures that where existing secure or assured tenants wish to swap their tenancy with a tenant on a fixed term tenancy at social rent, they will be granted a new secure or assured tenancy in their new home.

The consultation responses set out a clear view in favour of improved support to tenants seeking to move, though with reservations from many respondents about the need for additional regulation. In the light of these responses, and of the continuing need to increase mobility options for social tenants, the Government believes that the case for the proposed Direction remains strong.³⁰

The Government concluded that it would “simplify the terms of the Direction to give clarity to landlords that they can meet the terms of a new standard by subscribing to a provider who is part of *HomeSwap Direct*.” Responding to the issue of costs and IT equipment the Government said:

Subscription to a *HomeSwap Direct* provider need not add to landlords’ costs: indeed the great majority of landlords already subscribe to at least one of the members of the scheme. Nor will it be necessary to purchase new IT equipment in order to participate. As was stated in the consultation document smaller registered providers will be able to decide whether to pay subscription fees for individual tenants who wish to move rather than one annual subscription for the entire organisation if this approach offers better value for money.

While we recognise respondents have raised concerns about the cost associated with supporting tenants who do not have access to the internet, we believe that it is for individual registered providers, in consultation with their tenants, to determine what support is appropriate: we do not intend to issue guidance on this point.

The final directions to the Social Housing Regulator contain the following provisions in relation to mutual exchange:

Mutual exchange

3.— (1) The Regulator must set a standard relating to methods of assisting tenants to exchange tenancies, in particular the provision of access to an internet based mutual exchange service (“the Mutual Exchange Standard”).

(2) The Regulator must set the Mutual Exchange Standard with a view to achieving the following, so far as possible, that—

(a) registered providers subscribe to an internet based mutual exchange service which allows—

(i) a tenant to register an interest in arranging a mutual exchange through the mutual exchange service without payment of a fee;

(ii) the tenant to enter their current property details and the tenant’s requirements for the mutual exchange property they hope to obtain;

(iii) the tenant to be provided with the property details of those properties where a match occurs;

³⁰ DCLG, *Directions to the social housing regulator – consultation*, November 2011

(b) registered providers ensure the provider of the internet based mutual exchange service to which they subscribe is a signatory to an agreement, such as *HomeSwap Direct*, under which tenants can access matches across all (or the greatest practicable number of) internet based mutual exchange services;

(c) registered providers take reasonable steps to publicise the availability of any mutual exchange service(s) to which it subscribes to its tenants; and

(d) registered providers provide reasonable support to tenants who do not have access to the internet.³¹

4.5 Housing transfers, succession, under-occupying tenants & flexible tenancies

Several measures contained in the *Localism Act 2011* and *Welfare Reform Act 2012* are aimed, *inter alia*, at improving access to, and mobility within, the social rented housing sector.

Localism Act

The *Localism Act* removed the requirement on local authorities to assess transfer applications from existing tenants in the same way as applications from households seeking social housing:

We believe that taking transferring tenants out of the allocation framework will give local authorities more flexibility to manage their stock, and make it easier for them to strike an appropriate balance between the needs of existing tenants and those on the waiting list.³²

It also enables social landlords to offer new tenants a fixed-term tenancy for a minimum of two years (it is expected that in most cases the minimum term on offer will be five years). On the expiry of the fixed-term the landlord will assess whether the household is still in need of a social tenancy and will make a decision on whether or not to extend the term of the tenancy. Where tenancies are not extended the expectation is that the tenants will make their own housing arrangements, thus freeing up the accommodation for another household in need.

The rationale for giving social landlords flexibility over the length of tenancy offered is the idea that a “one size fits all” model is no longer appropriate:

Inflexible, lifetime tenancies also contribute to significant imbalances between the size of households and the properties they live in. While there are around a quarter of a million overcrowded households in social housing (measured against the bedroom standard) there are also over 400,000 households under-occupying their social homes by two bedrooms or more (measured against the bedroom standard). In every region apart from London the number of overcrowded social rented households is exceeded by the number of under-occupiers.

A one-size-fits-all model on rents and tenancies is not the best answer to the wide range of needs and circumstances of those accessing the social rented sector. The current system limits the extent to which subsidy is able to help all of those in real need – many of these people are currently unable to access social housing.³³

The rights of family members living with secure council tenants have been amended by the *Localism Act 2011* so that the statutory right of those other than spouses and partners to

³¹ *Ibid* Annex A

³² CLG, *Local decisions: a fairer future for social housing*, November 2010

³³ *ibid*

succeed to a secure tenancy has been removed (this provision is not retrospective). There can only be one statutory succession to a secure tenancy. Previously, in the absence of a spouse or partner, the close relatives of a secure tenant who had resided in the dwelling as their only or principal home for 12 months prior to the tenant's death also had a right to succeed to the tenancy. The statutory right of these people to succeed has been replaced with a discretionary power for local authorities to include additional succession rights as express terms in their tenancy agreements.

Welfare Reform Act

Measures in the *Welfare Reform Act 2012 and the Housing Benefit (Amendment) Regulations 2012* (in force from 1 April 2013) restrict the Housing Benefit of working-age tenants in social housing if they are living in accommodation that is deemed to be too large for their needs. One of the arguments advanced in support of this measure is that it will act as an incentive to improve the mobility of social housing tenants.³⁴

4.6 A new Right to Move

In September 2014 the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Eric Pickles, announced a [consultation](#) exercise on a Right to Move scheme which was first announced in the [Autumn Statement 2013](#):

Today, the Department for Communities and Local Government [consultation](#) will seek views on the introduction of new rules that would ensure local residency requirements do not prevent social tenants from moving into the area to take up work or training opportunities.

Social tenants relocating for work will be given greater priority, either by creating a new 'reasonable preference' category – used by councils to prioritise people for social housing – or through strengthened statutory guidance to ensure local authorities apply the existing 'hardship' reasonable preference category to include people moving for work or training.

Further proposed new statutory guidance will also ensure that every council in England would have to set aside a small proportion of lets for tenants who need to move because of work or training.

Authorities would be required to provide at least 1% of their existing stock under the Right to Move scheme although they would be free to offer more.

Any town hall that decides to offer less will need to explain to voters why.

On top of this, ministers will later this year launch a new fund to help a number of councils to trial new and innovative ways of helping people looking to move for work in their area.

In particular, the measures could be used for people already in existing social housing, who face a long wait to get the help they need to move.³⁵

Consultation responses were accepted up to 22 October 2014 - the responses are currently being analysed.

³⁴ For more information see Library note SN/SP/6272: [Under-occupation of social housing: Housing Benefit entitlement](#)

³⁵ [Right to Move: government launches consultation to support social tenants who want to work](#)