

Briefing Note

Committee name: Cabinet Housing Committee

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This note provides information to keep Members informed of matters relating to the work of the Cabinet or a committee but where no decisions from Members are needed.

If Members have questions relating to matters shown, they are asked to contact the officer indicated.

Government Strategy and Announcements

- a. On the 5 December Prime Minister, Keir Starmer, announced his Plan for Change and six milestones the government aim to achieve by the next general election:
 - Raising living standards in every part of the United Kingdom, so working people have more money in their pocket to deliver the highest sustained growth in the G7.
 - Building 1.5 million homes in England and fast-tracking planning decisions on at least 150 major economic infrastructure projects.
 - Ending hospital backlogs to meet the NHS standard of 92% of patients in England waiting no longer than 18 weeks for elective treatment.
 - Putting police back on the beat with a named officer for every neighbourhood, and 13,000 additional officers, police community support officers (PCSOs) and special constables in neighbourhood roles in England and Wales.
 - Giving children the best start in life, with a record 75% of 5-year-olds in England ready to learn when they start school.
 - Securing home-grown energy, protecting billpayers, and putting the UK on track to at least 95% clean power by 2030, while accelerating the UK to net zero.

To support these targets the forthcoming Planning and Infrastructure Bill will set out how the delivery process for critical infrastructure will be streamlined, including focuses on accelerating upgrades to the national grid and boosting renewable energy. New ten-year strategies for housing and infrastructure will also be published in Spring 2025, providing a roadmap for future investment and economic growth.

- b. The government has published its provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2025/26 which provides £69 billion overall for councils across the country, a 3.5%

real-terms increase in Core Spending Power on average and an additional £2 billion in grant funding. The settlement includes a new emergency £600 million Recovery Grant, which the government says will offer better value for money through the repurposing of grants to help support councils most in need and maximise every penny of public spending to ensure it delivers for working people. Confirmation of the final local government finance settlement will be published following consultation in early 2025.

The settlement confirms support for local authorities to boost housing stock through (some of which has been previously announced as part of the Autumn budget):

- A £500 million Affordable Homes Programme, delivering 5,000 new social and affordable homes.
- £450 million Local Authority Housing Fund to expand housing capacity.
- Extension of the preferential borrowing rate for council housebuilding until the end of 2025-26.

The announcement also included almost £1 billion in new funding in 2025 to enable councils across England to deliver its long-term plan to tackle homelessness. Funding will focus on making more resources available for frontline workers to provide essential services to prevent households from becoming homeless, address the growing use of nightly-let accommodation, whilst also streamlining funding structures for councils. The government also want to better equip councils to provide mediation between landlords and families to prevent evictions, help find new homes, and to access private rental properties through support for deposits. Councils will also be able to choose to provide funding to services including Housing First, which prioritises access to secure housing for people with histories of repeat homelessness and multiple disadvantage including drug and alcohol abuse.

- c. The Housing, Communities and Local Government (HCLG) Committee has announced a new inquiry to examine whether the local government finance system in England is capable of meeting the current and future needs of councils and their communities.
- d. The government's previously announced changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) were published on the 12 December 2024. The reforms have been warmly welcomed across the sector, although concern remains about the overall housing target with leading figures highlighting the need for significant investment and the ability for councils' to carry out long term financial planning. Key changes include:
 - New immediate mandatory housing targets for councils to 'ramp up' housebuilding and deliver growth across the country – totalling 370,000 across England, with higher mandatory targets in those places facing the most acute affordability. Councils will also need to adopt up-to-date local plans or develop new plans that work for their communities.
 - While remaining committed to a brownfield first approach, the updated NPPF will require councils to review their greenbelt boundaries to meet targets, identifying and prioritising lower quality 'grey belt' land.
 - Any development on greenbelt must meet strict requirements, via the new 'golden rules', which require developers to provide the necessary

infrastructure for local communities as well as a 'premium level' of social and affordable housing.

- Councils and developers will also need to give greater consideration to social rent when building new homes and local leaders have greater powers to build genuinely affordable homes for those who need them most.
 - Requirements to ensure homes are high-quality and well-designed without stalling growth.
 - Ministers will provide local authorities with three months in which to progress local plans that are currently in development, subject to conditions that catch those which significantly undershoot the new targets.
 - A new requirement will be introduced that, where plans based on old targets are still in place from July 2026, councils will need to provide for an extra year's supply of homes in their pipeline – six years instead of five. Where they do not, the strengthened presumption in favour of sustainable development would apply alongside the existing safeguards in national policy around provision of affordable housing, design quality, and sustainability of location.
 - To support councils to update their local plans and review their current greenbelt land, areas will receive an additional £100 million of cash next year that can be used to hire more staff and consultants as well as more resources to carry out technical studies and site assessments.
- e. In addition to the changes to the NPPF the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) have announced plans to overhaul local planning committees to speed up the planning process and support better decision making in the system. Under new plans to modernise the planning approval process, applications that comply with local development plans could bypass planning committees entirely to tackle chronic uncertainty, unacceptable delays and unnecessary waste of time and resources. The measures would also see a national scheme of delegation introduced with local planning officers given an enhanced decision-making role, the creation of streamlined committees for strategic development and mandatory training for planning committee members. A working paper of the policy has been published inviting views on the proposed options for change to planning committees in England. This is not a formal consultation and is instead intended to inform discussions with the sector, to determine whether and how to take these proposals forward.
- f. The Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Housing, Angela Rayner MP, has launched a consultation on the Government's plans to overhaul the Right to Buy (RtB) scheme. The proposals are designed to make the programme fairer and more sustainable while addressing decades of social housing decline. The consultation, which runs until 15 January 2025, is seeking views from stakeholders "*on how the Right to Buy should be reformed to deliver a fairer, better value and more sustainable scheme where longstanding tenants can buy their own homes but, crucially, where councils can replace those homes.*" The proposed reforms include:
- Increased eligibility periods
 - Exempting newly built homes
 - Discount reforms
 - Extending discount repayment periods
 - One-for-one replacements

- Simplifying receipts rules
- Protecting retrofitted homes

In Cheltenham we are also starting to see the impact of the previous announcement regarding the reduction of the Right to Buy discount, with 65 RTB applications (equivalent to 2/3 years' worth) received between October and mid-December.

- g. The Home Office published its response to the Emergency Evacuation Information Sharing Plus consultation that ended in August 2022. The consultation followed a recommendation from the Grenfell inquiry that called for a new duty on owners or managers of high-rise residential buildings to prepare a personal emergency evacuation plan (PEEP) for all residents who might find it difficult to “self-evacuate”. Despite strong support in an initial consultation for the measure it was rejected by the Conservative government who opened the 2022 consultation on an alternative package of measures called Emergency Evacuation Information Sharing Plus due to concerns over the practicality and proportionality of the original proposals. Labour has now confirmed that they will implement the Conservatives proposals in the second consultation, which recommended sharing the location of disabled residents with fire services. Concerns have been raised by disability rights activists and the National Fire Chiefs Council that this may not be enough to ensure the safety of residents who may be in need of evacuation assistance. The Council does not have any high-rise blocks within its stock however we will monitor the implementation of this policy to establish any further PEEPs that are required.
- h. The government has announced the creation of ‘Respect orders’, which it says meet its manifesto pledge to crack down on antisocial behaviour (ASB). The orders will give the police and local councils powers to ban persistent offenders from town centres or from drinking in public spots such as high streets and local parks. Offenders may also be required to undertake positive rehabilitation, such as attending drug or alcohol treatment services or anger management courses. Failure to comply with Respect Orders will be a criminal offence. The orders will be piloted before being rolled out nationally.
- i. The government has announced that five thousand more construction apprenticeship places will be made available per year with 32 pioneering new Homebuilding Skills Hubs developed using a £140m industry investment. These hubs will deliver fast-track training to local areas that need more housing, while giving apprentices vital skills to boost housebuilding in the UK. The purpose-built hubs will also provide a realistic working environment for training for key construction trades, including bricklayers, roofers, plasterers, scaffolders, electricians, carpenters and more. The government is working with the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) and the National House-Building Council (NHBC) to launch the Hubs by 2028, and are working with Skills England to identify the areas that need construction workers the most.

Regulator of Social Housing (RSH)

- j. The Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) has issued its official response to the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (LUHC) Committee’s report on the finances and sustainability of the social housing sector. The predecessor to the current

Committee published its report in May 2024 which highlighted significant challenges facing the sector, including financial pressures from decarbonisation, fire safety improvements and constrained funding mechanisms. The inquiry emphasised the importance of the social housing sector in providing affordable, secure homes for millions across England.

The RSH's detailed response acknowledged the Committee's findings, including:

- Highlighting the sector's strong liquidity and secured income streams but noting concerns over declining financial performance, with aggregate sector earnings falling below debt servicing costs for the first time since 2009.
- Reaffirming its commitment to ensuring registered providers (RPs) manage risks effectively, whilst highlighting the balance needed to maintain existing stock whilst expanding housing supply.
- Recognising the unprecedented pressures, the RSH emphasised the need for RPs to deploy reserves strategically to address urgent safety and quality improvements.

The RSH has stated that it is intensifying its scrutiny of providers showing weak financial performance and has strengthened its regulatory tools to address governance and engagement issues. It also detailed its efforts to ensure transparency in how providers allocate resources, including introducing new consumer standards and tenant satisfaction measures (TSMs). These tools aim to improve accountability and responsiveness to tenant needs.

- k. At the end of November the RSH published the TSM results for 2023-2024. The results included the scores of nearly 360 landlords that manage over 1000 homes. The 22 measures are split into 10 metrics based on landlord health and safety data, and 12 based on tenant perception surveys. The latter covers topics such as repairs, complaint-handling, anti-social behaviour, and whether tenants feel listened to and respected. The surveys are now the main way tenants can express how they feel about their social landlord. The RSH also published the findings of its National Tenant Survey, which involved 3,500 social housing tenants and shared owners. Inside Housing identified the following key takeaways from the results:
- Collection methods for surveys have an impact on scores leading the RSH to group data together by collection method. Of the landlords that submitted data, 65% used telephone surveys as their predominant collection method, while only small numbers of landlords used internet, postal or face-to-face methods as their main approach. Telephone surveys had an average satisfaction of 70%, average scores for internet surveys (58%) were significantly lower and for face-to-face surveys significantly higher (75%).
 - Analysis concluded that repairs and maintenance services appear to be the most significant specific drivers of overall satisfaction among tenants. It found that 64% of tenants who were dissatisfied with overall landlord services cited repairs issues as the reason. Well-maintained properties, which is a key driver of overall satisfaction, is mentioned in relation to repairs and more generally (11%). Other wider areas of maintenance such as communal areas (6%) and greenery (1%) are also cited. Customer service is also an area of dissatisfaction (16%), as are costs (8%).
 - When looking at the link between tenant characteristics and overall satisfaction, age was found to have the biggest impact. The RSH found that

tenants over 65 have significantly higher average overall satisfaction (82%) compared with other age groups. Tenants aged between 16 and 34 are on average 69% satisfied, compared with 63% for those aged 35 to 54 and 67% for those aged 55 to 65. It also found that female tenants are significantly less satisfied than male tenants in terms of overall satisfaction – 67% vs 75%. The data also showed that people in supported housing are more satisfied – on average 77.5% – than those who are not.

- The data shows that tenants living in London are significantly less satisfied than those outside the capital, with an average satisfaction score of 61%. This compares with 73% in the North, 71% in the South and 72% in the Midlands.
 - The findings revealed that shared owners are on average much less satisfied overall when compared with social housing tenants, with just under half satisfied with the service provided by their landlord. For shared owners, levels of satisfaction for the TSM on whether the landlord listens to tenant views and acts upon them was 44%, and 24% for complaint-handling. Where shared owners are dissatisfied, their reasons include rent or service charges (38%), repairs issues (33%) and general customer service (26%).
 - The TSM data showed complaint-handling is one of the main areas landlords can improve upon. Tenants reported an average satisfaction score of 34.5%, the lowest across all measures. It found that repairs and maintenance issues constitute the majority of issues tenants report complaining about (59%). Particular issues include taking too long to deal with repairs, damp and mould, issues with plumbing and heating, and poor quality of workmanship. When tenants were asked what could improve the complaint-handling process, they said improving customer service, responding quicker and better communication.
- I. Interestingly, Newham Council achieved the highest tenant satisfaction measure (TSM) score of all London local authorities in 2023-24, despite being the first landlord to receive a C4 grade from the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) which does seem to indicate a discrepancy in the regulator's new regime. A spokesperson for the RSH told Inside Housing that the TSMs were "*only one source of information*" it uses to regulate landlords and that it recognised "*collection methods can potentially impact on results*". Members of the Housing Cabinet Committee are therefore reminded of the importance of looking at all of the data and information available to them and not just the external facing satisfaction measures.

Housing Ombudsman

- m. The Housing Ombudsman has released its latest 'learning from severe maladministration' report, focusing on hazards that it sees in its casework ahead of the introduction of Awaab's Law. The report is set out by hazard category, sometimes multiple, and show the significant harm that can be caused when hazards are not identified and then dealt with effectively. Hazards covered include contaminated water supply, risk of falls, unsafe electrics as well as damp and mould. In one case, a landlord failed to deal with a pest infestation, leaving dead rats and an awful smell in the home, despite conducting a home condition survey at this time which found there were no issues present. In other cases landlords failed to deal with a carbon monoxide leak and children were living in a home with exposed electrical wires or holes in the floor large enough to fall through. The Ombudsman

recommends that landlords need to act on not just monitoring and addressing hazards but also showing good practice in communication and record keeping to help prevent future problems.

Developments that may impact tenants

- n. The government has announced a £15 million funding increase for the Help to Claim scheme, aimed at supporting individuals transitioning from legacy benefits, such as Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), to Universal Credit. The funding, announced by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), comes as part of a broader government initiative to accelerate the transition to Universal Credit, with an updated completion date of March 2026 (instead of the original target of 2028). The accelerated timeline will affect more than 800,000 people on ESA, with migration notices set to be issued to over 60,000 households per month starting in February 2025.

Research and Campaigns

- o. The MHCLG have released statistics on social housing lettings in England from the year up to March 2024. The data highlights a modest recovery in lettings following a prolonged period of decline and sheds light on the dynamics of tenancy types, rent categories and regional variations. A total of 261,000 new social housing lettings were recorded in 2023/24, representing a 4% increase from the previous year. This marks a continuation of stability observed since 2021/22, after several years of declining lettings. The majority of these lettings (86%) were re-lets of existing stock, while 14% were predominantly newly built properties. Key findings include:
 - Social Rent lettings made up 79% of new social housing lettings, though their number fell by 2,000 compared to 2022/23. Affordable Rent lettings saw a notable increase, making up 19% of new lettings, while Intermediate Rent lettings rose to 2%.
 - General Needs lettings accounted for 73% of new lettings, down slightly from 75% the previous year, while Supported Housing lettings increased to 27%.
 - Private registered providers were responsible for 72% of new social lettings, with local authorities providing the remaining 28%.
 - The median vacancy duration before re-lets was 29 days, a slight improvement from the previous year's 30 days.
 - Regional variations also emerged, with the North East recording the highest churn rate – the proportion of existing stock re-let – at 6.7%.
 - The median weekly rent for new social housing lettings in 2023/24 was £103 compared to £93 in 2022/23. Regional differences saw average rents in London at £135 per week, compared to £91 in Yorkshire and the Humber.
 - Lifetime tenancies continued to dominate, constituting 78% of all new lettings, a figure consistent with 2022/23.
- p. The latest affordable housing supply statistics released by Homes England show that 62,289 affordable homes were delivered (completions) in England in 2023-24, a decrease of 2% compared to the previous year but the second highest delivery since 2014-15. Meanwhile, there were 43,439 affordable housing starts on site in England in 2023-24, a decrease of 39% compared to the previous year and the lowest value

on record for comparable years from 2016-17 onwards. Also of note from the statistics:

- 65% of new affordable housing completions were for rent (including social, affordable and intermediate rent), similar to the previous 5 years.
 - 9,866 of new affordable housing completions were for social rent, the highest value since 2013-14.
 - 44% of all affordable homes delivered in 2023-24 were funded through section 106 (nil grant) agreements, compared to 47% in the previous year and similar to 2021-22.
 - The number of shared ownership completions has increased from 4,084 in 2015-16 to 20,364 in the latest year.
 - In 2023-24, 79% of all affordable housing were delivered by private registered providers, with local authorities delivering 14% and non-registered providers 2%. These percentages have been broadly stable since 2015-16, accounting for small fluctuations year-on-year.
- q. In a bid to ease the temporary accommodation crisis in England, the Local Government Association has called for temporary accommodation subsidy rates to be uprated to 90% of the current Local Housing Allowance. The call was echoed by Lord Bird, founder of The Big Issue magazine, who walked out of a HCLG inquiry on rough sleeping. He told MPs he did not want to become part of “*a farce*” and said he had been having the same discussion on rising rough sleeping for years. He stressed the importance of the government focusing resources on preventing homelessness in the first place rather than on emergency funding for homelessness services. This could include funding for local authorities, uprating Local Housing Allowance rates and grant funding for building new social homes. [*\(Please see item b for details of homelessness measures laid out in the proposed Local Government Finance Settlement\).*](#)
- r. Following the government’s commitment to developing a long-term housing strategy, Inside Housing have partnered with the National Housing Federation (NHF) to advance the next phase of the Plan for Housing campaign. The campaign will produce a series of opinion pieces from contributors across the housing sphere to spark ideas, provide insights, and offer policy suggestions that can shape a comprehensive, long-term strategy addressing the housing crisis in its entirety. The series will reflect the diverse voices of housing providers, residents, builders, designers, planners, as well as our partners in the health and charity sectors, and housing policy experts.
- s. An independent report by the Older People’s Housing (OPH) Taskforce was published at the end of November and highlighted the following key findings:
- An estimated 30-50,000 new later living homes will be required per annum to meet growth needs.
 - Current private leasehold OPH options are unaffordable for the majority of English households aged 75 years and over.
 - Around 0.6% live in Housing with Care in the UK - a tenth of the proportion in more mature markets such as the USA, Australia and New Zealand.
 - The vast majority of over 65s - more than nine out of ten - currently live in mainstream housing.

- Only 12% of older people had level access at the entrance of their building; less than half have a bathroom on the entry level of their home.
 - Older people are unaware of the options available to them, and admit to 'burying their heads' as to their future housing needs.
- t. The Resolution Foundation has published its final Housing Outlook report for 2024, in which it notes that 1.1 million children in the UK today live in a household whose income would not fall below the poverty line if housing costs were not taken into account, adding that high rents pushed an additional 670,000 children in private rented homes into poverty in 2022-23. It notes that, given this, the greatest scope for reducing child poverty via housing policy is by increasing Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates. It states that permanently repegging LHA rates to the 30th percentile of local rents would mean 75,000 fewer children in poverty by the end of the Parliament, and aligning the LHA with the 50th percentile of local rents from 2025 onwards would lift 130,000 children out of poverty by 2029-30. It states that these measures could cost £1.8 billion or £3.1 billion respectively in 2029-30 (in 2024-25 prices) based on current rent growth forecasts.

The End Child Poverty Coalition (ECPC), comprising 120 children's charities and organisations, has also published eight key tests for the Government's Child Poverty Strategy, due in Spring 2025. The Coalition is urging the Government to take bold action, including immediately scrapping the two-child benefit cap, setting legally binding poverty reduction targets, and committing to fundamental reforms of the social security system. The ECPC emphasised that the two-child benefit cap, which according to their research currently affects 1.6 million children and pulls 109 children into poverty every day, must be scrapped as a matter of urgency. This single policy change is projected to lift 300,000 children out of poverty immediately.

- u. A new report from the think tank Centre for Cities has found that a large increase in housebuilding could deliver £6.4 billion per year to fund infrastructure and community facilities if ministers secure a share of 'windfall' increases in land values for the public purse. The think tank says a total of £193 billion could be generated over a 30-year period if the Government combines increases in housebuilding with more effective tools for capturing and reinvesting the revenues from the development. Though the report goes on to warn that capturing this uplift in value will require ministers to be bold in tackling the related challenges of green belt reform and land pricing.
- v. A new report commissioned by the charity End Furniture Poverty has shown the financial and social benefits of furnished tenancy schemes in social housing, finding that every pound spent on such initiatives saves more than twice that amount in public expenditure. These savings were found to be across the NHS, criminal justice and the Department for Work and Pensions, amongst other public services. End Furniture Poverty is urging the Government to ensure 10% of social homes are furnished and to legislate if social landlords fail to act, highlighting the associated benefits for social landlords that have furnishing schemes, including reduced rental arrears and void costs, as well as increased tenancy sustainment and lower costs associated with tenant turnover. The report shows that £14 is saved in wider public spending for every pound invested in local authority crisis support schemes, which provide essential items like furniture, white goods and heating appliances, as well as support such as food vouchers and debt relief. Savings for councils were also

significant, with an average of £11 saved per pound invested through reduced demands on homelessness services, temporary accommodation and social services.

The research paints a concerning picture of furniture poverty in the UK:

- At least 9% of the population live in furniture poverty, with over one million people in 'deep furniture poverty' – lacking three or more essential items.
- While 29% of private rental properties are furnished, only 2% of social homes are currently provided as such, leaving 26% of social housing tenants affected by furniture poverty.

w. The Environmental Audit Committee (EAC) has launched its first inquiry of the new Parliament, focusing on the environmental sustainability of the Government's target to build 1.5 million homes in England over the next five years. The inquiry will examine the ecological impact of the planning reforms necessary to meet this target. The Government's proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), aimed at releasing more land for development, were recently subject to a public consultation. Published responses highlighted risks to biodiversity, carbon emissions and local nature recovery efforts. The EAC's inquiry will explore critical questions about how housing growth can align with environmental and climate goals. Areas of focus include ensuring the protection and enhancement of natural habitats, reducing embodied carbon levels in construction, and implementing local nature recovery networks.

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