

Briefing Note

Committee name: Cabinet Housing Committee

Date: 1 April 2026

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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. The government has published its response to the Decent Homes Standard (DHS) consultation and have confirmed that all rented properties must meet the new standard by 2035. This deadline does not affect the previously established deadlines for Awaab's Law and the Renter's Rights Act, or the 2030 deadlines for energy efficiency and minimum energy efficiency requirements (MEES).

Changes to the new DHS include:

- Remove age from the definition of disrepair so that building components don't have to be old and broken to be in disrepair, only broken.
- Introduce a new criterion, requiring that landlords ensure their properties are free from damp and mould.
- Provide additions to the building component list.
- Require all rented properties to provide child-resistant window restrictors.
- Embed MEES for the private rental sector (PRS) and sustainability recording standards (SRS) within the DHS.
- The reformed DHS will be extended to apply to temporary accommodation, supported housing and leasehold rented properties.

To provide an overview the new DHS will require:

- Criterion A – Homes must be free from the most dangerous hazards assessed against the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS).
- Criterion B – A home must be in a reasonable state of repair as assessed against the state of key building components.
- Criterion C – A home must provide core facilities and services (for example, kitchens, bathrooms, and insulation).

- Criterion D – A home must provide thermal comfort, including meeting applicable MEES (a full government response to the consultation held on MEES last year is still awaited).
 - Criterion E – A home should be free of damp and mould.
- b. The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) published the Warm Homes Plan, laying out plans for increasing the energy efficiency of 5 million homes by 2050. The Plan will collectively deliver £15 billion of public investment, including a mix of grant and finance. Major elements of the Plan include.
- £5 billion targeted towards ‘low income’ households, including £4.4 billion of grant and £600 million of finance initially delivered through the existing Warm Homes Social Housing Fund (with those in receipt of Wave 3 prioritised in 2026-27).
 - A new Warm Homes Agency will be established to oversee delivery of the Plan.
 - The Future Homes Standard will be published in the summer.
 - £1 billion of funding will be provided for heat networks through the Green Heat Network Fund and the Heat Network Efficiency Scheme.
 - £2 billion of consumer loans for homeowners to improve the energy efficiency of their homes.
 - £2.7 billion for the Boiler Upgrade Scheme (BUS) – grants for homeowners to replace gas boilers with electric heating systems such as heat pumps.
 - A new Warm Homes Fund worth £5 billion to provide loans to industry and businesses, looking to drive down the costs of the net zero transition.

The plan also demonstrates a slight shift in tone with a greater emphasis on increasing the uptake of technological improvements, such as solar PV, heat pumps, and batteries, rather than the overwhelming focus on fabric and insulation improvements that have been seen previously. The Plan does make clear that cost-effective insulation improvements will still be supported, but it is likely that funding programmes in the future will prioritise lower-cost insulation such as loft top ups, rather than those which have struggled to demonstrate value-for-money such as External Wall Insulation.

- c. Changes to domestic Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs) have been delayed until the second half of 2027 following consultation. The government is aiming to share an implementation plan by summer 2026. The reforms aim to reshape how EPCs assess homes’ energy performance, moving away from a single headline rating and instead use four headline metrics: energy cost, fabric performance, heating system, and smart readiness. The changes will have implications for investments ahead of future minimum energy efficiency requirements (MEES). The government has also confirmed that the current ten-year validity period for EPCs will be retained, including EPCs completed before the reforms are introduced.
- d. The government has confirmed that rent convergence will begin from April 2027, rather than the 2026 start originally anticipated – with uplifts set at £1 per week above CPI+1% in 2027 and £2 per week from 2028 until formula rent is reached. Rent convergence will only apply to formula rent, and not to the 5% (10% for supported housing) uplift charged in many areas. Although the start date is later than expected, the final approach still provides a clear, long-term pathway for aligning

rents with formula levels and gives landlords certainty over how convergence will be phased in.

- e. The draft Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill was published on 27 January 2026. The reforms build on action currently being undertaken by the government to implement the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act 2024, including increased transparency over service charges so that leaseholders can better hold their landlords to account. The bill will be subject to pre-legislative scrutiny before it is formally introduced to Parliament. The government has asked the Housing, Communities and Local Government (HCLG) committee to investigate whether the proposed reforms will be effective and what changes the government could make to improve the draft bill. The committee will hold a series of oral evidence sessions starting in March 2026. Later in the spring, the committee will publish its findings in a report to the government.
- f. The HCLG Committee has published its report on housing conditions in social housing. They have concluded that progress in improving the quality of social housing has largely stalled since the pandemic with too many tenants continuing to live in unacceptable conditions. The Committee found that while most social homes are safe and decent, just under 430k social homes fail to meet the existing DHS, particularly concerning as the minimum standard itself has not been substantively updated for two decades. Meaning that even many of the homes that are currently considered “decent” would not meet modern expectations of safety, comfort, and health. The report made the following recommendations:
 - A clearer timeline of when the next phases of Awaab’s law will apply.
 - The government to amend the definition of fuel poverty in its upcoming fuel strategy.
 - Interim targets stipulating the percentage of social homes that should be upgraded to the revised Decent Homes Standard in each year before it comes into force in 2035.
 - A process to review and, if necessary, update the DHS at least every ten years.
- g. Homes England has opened bidding for the Social and Affordable Homes Programme (SAHP) 2026-2036, inviting registered providers to apply for grant funding from a programme worth at least £27 billion. The programme aims to deliver hundreds of thousands of new homes for social rent, affordable rent, and affordable homeownership, with a requirement that partners must deliver at least 60% of homes for social rent. Updated bidding guidance set out expectations for high quality, deliverable schemes that demonstrate strong value for money and align with both local strategies and national housing priorities.

Access to the programme will be available through two routes. The Continuous Market Engagement route will allow partners to work with Homes England on a scheme-by-scheme basis throughout the life of the programme, offering greater flexibility around grant funding to respond to local housing need. The Strategic Partnership Framework route, for the largest developers, will provide longer term funding certainty, with larger funding packages allocated in support of more ambitious programmes.

- h. The government has outlined a package of steps designed to boost council housebuilding. An additional £3.5 million is being added to the Council Housebuilding Support Fund, on top of last year's £5.5 million, to help councils prepare development plans capable of unlocking up to 9,800 new homes through the Social and Affordable Homes Programme. The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) threshold will be lifted from 200 to 1,000 homes, giving smaller councils more scope to expand their housing stock without taking on extra operating costs. To support larger-scale delivery, the discounted Public Works Loan Board borrowing rate will be maintained, helping councils access affordable finance for new build programmes. This discounted borrowing rate will be maintained at "gilts+40bps" and available exclusively for housebuilding through the HRA.
- i. The government will publish time-limited emergency guidance to unblock Section 106 affordable homes that are already built, or due to complete by December 2027, but currently have no registered provider (RP) buyer. Where developers can demonstrate they have made genuine efforts to sell homes under the agreed S106 terms, Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) are now explicitly encouraged to renegotiate or vary S106 agreements. As part of this new process, any uncontracted homes must be placed on the Homes England Clearing Service by June 2026 for at least six weeks as a final attempt to secure an RP buyer. If no reasonable offer comes forward, LPAs can agree deeds of variation to change the tenure, allow an alternative form of affordable housing provision, or accept commuted sums instead. The guidance urges LPAs to take a pragmatic, light-touch, and prompt approach, aiming to conclude decisions within around 12 weeks.
- j. The government has established a Supported Housing Advisory Panel to support implementation of the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023 and provide expert advice on wider policy issues affecting the sector. The government are also currently consulting on wider reforms to the supported housing sector, including proposals for a locally led licensing regime across England, the introduction of new national standards intended to improve the quality and oversight of supported housing services and potential changes to housing benefit arrangements.

Housing Ombudsman

- k. The Housing Ombudsman have highlighted the rise in complaint volumes in recent years, with cases rising by almost 500% over five years to more than 13,000 in 2025/26. It is currently completing more than 800 investigations each month and expects this to reach 1000. To address the challenges this provides the Ombudsman have opened a consultation on their 2026/27 Business Plan, including proposals to introduce targets to determine 90% of high-risk cases within four months and 50% of all cases within six months, while ensuring that no case remains open for more than 16 months by the end of the year. The plan also outlines a three-year strategy to reduce caseloads through faster case routing, improved complaint handling by landlords to prevent escalation to the Ombudsman, reducing the age of the oldest open cases and increasing operational efficiency. Subject to consultation and approval by the Secretary of State, the annual membership fee paid by social landlords is proposed to increase from £8.03 to £10.56 per home from April 2026 to

reflect the 87% increase in demand.

- I. The Housing Ombudsman has published a new learning from severe maladministration report focused on how social landlords approach compensation, alongside new guidance intended to drive greater consistency and fairness across the sector. The guidance, developed through engagement with both landlords and residents, will come into effect from 1 April 2026 and sets out core principles for determining compensation where service failures have occurred. The report has argued that such failures undermine trust and exacerbate harm, particularly where vulnerable households are affected.

Research and Campaigns

- m. The Local Government Association (LGA) has warned that the cost to councils in England of providing temporary accommodation (TA) for homeless households is projected to more than double by 2029 to 2030 without further intervention. Councils have spent almost £1.5 billion more on TA since 2017-2018 than they have been reimbursed through housing benefit due to the cap on housing benefit not matching rising demand. Current rules allow councils to reclaim only up to 90% of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates, which were last set in 2011. If the LGA's projected 65% net cost increase over the next 5 years is not addressed this could lead to a cumulative shortfall of £3.9 billion over four years.

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