

Press release: Consumer Council for Water Board member appointments

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has appointed two new independent members to the Board of the Consumer Council for Water.

Robert Wilson and Alison Austin have been appointed for four years commencing on 1 July 2018. Board members provide non-executive leadership challenge and support to the executive through regular Board meetings, committees and groups.

The Consumer Council for Water is the voice of water and sewerage customers in England and Wales. It represents the views of customers to Government, the regulators and water companies. It also handles complaints about water companies where customers are not satisfied with a company's performance.

All appointments are made on merit and political activity plays no part in the selection process. The appointments have been made in accordance with the Ministerial Governance Code on Public Appointments.

There is a requirement for appointees' political activity (if significant) in the last five years to be declared. Robert Wilson has declared that he held ministerial office for the Conservative party.

Consumer Council for Water Board members receive remuneration of £7,812 per annum based on a minimum time commitment of 2 days a month.

Biographies

Rob Wilson is the current Chair of The Community Bank and was previously Chair of an IT company. Until June 2017, Rob was a Minister at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and prior to this was a Minister for Cabinet Office. During his time at the Cabinet Office, Rob was responsible for reforming the charity fundraising and the National Citizen Service as well as implementing the Prime Minister's 'Big Society' agenda.

Alison Austin has more than 25 years of consumer affairs experience, having led sustainability, environmental, food safety, corporate and public affairs work for Sainsbury's Supermarkets Ltd. She established her own sustainability consultancy practice in 2009. She is presently the Independent Board member of Seafish and also chairs their Remuneration Committee.

Alison chaired the Defra-appointed Seafood Industry Expert Group from 2016 to 2018 which resulted in a 25 year plan for a thriving seafood industry in England – Seafood 2040, a strategic framework for England. Alison is currently a Trustee of the Green Alliance, chair of the Soil Association Certification Scrutiny Committee and also the SGS Independent Advisory Committee on Climate change for SGS UK Ltd.

Previously she was a Board member and then Trustee of the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) where she sat on the Audit and Risk Committee.

Alison was awarded the OBE in 2000 for services to sustainable development.

[Press release: Longer tenancy plans to give renters more security](#)

Renters who may be forced to leave their homes at short notice will be given more security thanks to government action to introduce longer tenancy terms.

In plans published today (2 July 2018), Secretary of State for Communities Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP proposes the introduction of a minimum 3-year tenancy term, with a 6-month break clause, to help renters put down roots, and give landlords longer term financial security.

According to government data, people stay in their rented homes for an average of nearly 4 years. But despite this, 81% of rental contracts are assured shorthold tenancies with a minimum fixed term of just 6 or 12 months.

This can lead to tenants feeling insecure, unable to challenge poor property standards for fear of tenancies being terminated, and unable to plan for their future or contribute to their wider community.

Although tenants and landlords can already agree longer terms between themselves, the majority choose not to do so.

Under the proposed longer term agreement, tenants would be able to leave before the end of the minimum term, but would have greater protection if they wanted to stay in a property for an extended period of time.

Secretary of State for Communities Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP said:

It is deeply unfair when renters are forced to uproot their lives or find new schools for their children at short notice due to the terms of their rental contract.

Being able to call your rental property your home is vital to putting down roots and building stronger communities.

That's why I am determined to act, bringing in longer tenancies which will bring benefits to tenants and landlords alike.

As part of its continuing commitment to give more security to renters, an [8-week consultation on the plan has been published](#), specifically looking at

overcoming the barriers to landlords offering longer tenancies.

The 3-year model is one of a range of options and the consultation seeks views on longer minimum tenancies, which are used in other countries, as well as ideas on how to implement the model agreement.

Landlords play a vital role in providing homes to millions of people in this country and the proposals ensure that longer tenancies help them avoid costly periods while they search for new tenants and offers them flexibility to regain their properties when their circumstances change.

The government understands that some landlords worry about the time it can take to gain possession of their property in the courts. A call for evidence will be published this autumn to better understand the experience of users of the courts and tribunal services in property cases, including considering the case for a specialist Housing Court.

As part of the [consultation](#), which runs until 26 August 2018, ministers are seeking views from landlords, tenants and related organisations about the most effective ways to tackle obstacles to introducing longer tenancies.

If government proceeds with mandatory longer tenancies, primary legislation will be required. Following the results of the consultation, the government will consider next steps with legal professionals.

The consultation will consider whether there should be any exemptions – such as for student accommodation.

[News story: Surveillance camera system buyers' toolkit launched](#)

Tony Porter, the Surveillance Camera Commissioner, has [launched a buyers' toolkit](#) – a key deliverable of the [National Surveillance Camera Strategy for England and Wales](#).

The toolkit is an easy-to-follow guide for non-experts who are thinking about buying a surveillance camera system and want to ensure they buy an effective system that does what they want it to do.

It's aimed at small and medium sized enterprises (up to 250 staff) and micro-businesses (up to 9 staff) but the toolkit is valuable for any organisation considering using surveillance cameras.

Following the guidance in the toolkit will help people make informed decisions about whether surveillance can be justified as a solution to their problems. If surveillance cameras are necessary, then the toolkit is full of

advice and tips on how to get the best out of your prospective suppliers.

Tony Porter said:

The launch of the toolkit is a significant milestone in the life of the National Surveillance Camera Strategy. I'm very grateful to the British Security Industry Association and everyone who has been involved in developing the toolkit.

This guidance will be extremely useful for any organisation thinking about installing a surveillance camera system to really consider if surveillance cameras are needed and if they are giving them the knowledge they need to buy, install and maintain an effective system.

[Press release: Funding for new leasehold houses to end](#)

New government funding schemes will no longer be able to use the money for unjustified new leasehold houses, in a continuing push to tackle unfair and abusive practices within the leasehold system.

The move was announced by Communities Secretary, the Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP, as he outlined the government's next steps towards delivering both the homes the country needs and a fairer, more transparent system for homebuyers.

Among the measures announced today are:

- New proposals for 3-year minimum tenancy terms, with a 6-month break clause, to make renting more secure helping renters put down roots, and give landlords longer term financial security.
- The release of £450 million to speed up delivery of homes on sites of surplus public sector land and encouraging pace and modern methods of construction as a part of the building process.
- The launch of a new £100 million Community Housing Fund, to deliver affordable housing tailored to local needs, putting communities in the driving seat.

The Communities Secretary also confirmed that through Homes England almost

1,000 new affordable homes will be built on a previously undeveloped site at Burgess Hill, Sussex demonstrating how a more strategic – and assertive – approach to getting homes and large scale projects built was delivering results.

The Burgess Hill site will also see essential, new infrastructure built with two new primary schools, a secondary school and a range of leisure facilities including a new public woodland.

Speaking to an audience at the Policy Exchange the Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP, Secretary of State for Communities, said:

We need to get everyone on board to build at scale and pace to build the homes this country needs.

But this isn't just about getting the numbers up. We don't have to make a false choice between quality and quantity.

It's also about building places that people are happy to call home. Places where they can come together in strong, thriving communities for generations to come.

Leasehold generally applies to flats with shared spaces, making multiple ownership more straightforward, but developers have been increasingly selling houses on these terms – adding further costs to over-stretched house buyers.

The government is already working to make it cheaper and easier for existing leaseholders to buy-out their freehold and improve information available about redress for those consumers who face the most onerous terms.

Changes will also be made so that ground rents on new long leases – for both houses and flats – are set to zero.

And with 1.4 million leasehold houses across England and the number of leasehold sales rapidly growing, this latest announcement is another example of the government taking action to make the leasehold market fairer.

The Secretary of State continued:

We have seen leaseholders in new-build homes facing unexpected costs rising every year that bear no relation to services and that's not fair.

So from now on any new government funding scheme will contain the condition that the money cannot support the unjustified use of leasehold for new homes.

These measures relate to England only.

[Press release: £19 million fund to support victims of domestic abuse](#)

Almost £19 million of funding to expand support for survivors of domestic abuse services across the country has been launched today (2 July 2018) by the Secretary of State for Communities.

Councils working in partnership with charities and other organisations will be able to bid for a share of funding to support survivors of domestic abuse.

This will be available for a wide range of services to help survivors rebuild their lives; including the provision of refuge beds, education, and employment and life skills training.

This funding builds on £20 million allocated in 2016 to 2018 which has helped provide more than 2,200 new bed spaces in refuges and other specialist accommodation, supporting more than 19,000 survivors with a safe space to rebuild their lives.

Secretary of State for Communities, Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP said:

Domestic abuse is a devastating crime and this government is committed to ensuring all survivors have access to the support they need, whenever they need it.

This funding will expand the support available for survivors to help them rebuild their lives.

This fund has already helped to support diverse projects across the country, including:

Lancashire County Council – Jane’s Place of Recovery Refuge

- Funding was used to establish ‘Jane’s Place’, to accommodate 46 residents, across 15 self contained flats. In the first 7 months the refuge, specialising in providing safe accommodation for those at most risk of harm, accommodated 52 women and their families.

The Hampshire Making Safe Scheme’, led by Hart District Council

- Covering 11 local authorities in Hampshire, this project aims to fund 3 approaches including access to safe houses, enhanced security measures within client’s own homes and effective ways for life after living in safe houses or refuges. This project is particularly targeted at those from BAME communities or those with complex needs.

The government has also published updated guidelines, created in partnership with experts for councils to share best practice with charities and other organisations in meeting the needs of diverse communities including BAME, disabled and LGBT victims.

Katie Ghose, Chief Executive of Women's Aid, said:

The release of the next round of funding for refuges and other accommodation for women escaping domestic abuse is desperately needed, and much welcomed. Our national network of refuges not only save lives but transform them, helping women and their children to rebuild their lives.

With a decision about the future of refuge funding after 2020 due to be made in the coming months, we look forward to working with the government to ensure the future safety of survivors.

Together we need to ensure that there is a sustainable, long-term funding solution for all domestic abuse services, including lifesaving refuges. Only then can we guarantee that every survivor and her children can get the support they need to build a life free from domestic abuse.

The 2015 Spending Review contained dedicated long term funding of £40 million to support victims of domestic abuse.

- The first allocations of the £20 million fund was announced November 2016 led by local authorities working in partnership with service providers for work in 2016 to 2018
- A further £1.2 million will be allocated towards domestic abuse services in due course
- See the [full list of allocations](#)

Further case studies of the 2016 to 2018 fund:

- Royal London Borough of Greenwich – The Multiple Needs & Intensive Support Project Greenwich used part of the funding to employ a Complex Needs support worker, providing intensive support to survivors across the lifetime of the project.
- North Lincolnshire Council Grant funding was used to secure additional resources to ensure that both female and male victims of domestic abuse were able to access immediate support at times of crisis.

Today's announcement builds on steps taken by government to end domestic abuse, support victims and ensure offenders are prosecuted. Including:

- new powers and laws – a new domestic abuse offence to capture coercive and controlling behaviour, the criminalisation of forced marriage, and the introduction of new stalking laws
- the national roll-out of domestic violence protection orders and the domestic violence disclosure scheme
- £15 million, 3-year Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Service Transformation Fund
- £3.5 million provided in 2015 that funded 46 successful bids from around the country, providing 710 extra bed spaces
- £10 million funding announced by the coalition government for strengthening provision of safe accommodation in the last Spending Review period
- we will shortly be introducing a new landmark Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill to protect and support victims, recognise the life-long impact domestic abuse has on children and make sure agencies effectively respond to domestic abuse

View the government's [updated priorities for domestic abuse services](#).