

Housing Minister's speech at PlaceShapers annual conference

Good morning. It is a pleasure to address you at the first ever virtual PlaceShapers annual conference.

I would like to begin by thanking the PlaceShapers network for your tireless efforts in supporting the social housing sector, including the two million people who rely on you and the essential services you provide.

I would also like to pay tribute to the many housing associations, housing providers and professional organisations involved in this vital sector for your incredible resilience and forbearance during this challenging time.

Since the onset of COVID-19, you have shown professionalism and commitment in utilising your expertise and providing support to millions of social housing tenants. You should be proud of what you have achieved.

This pandemic has made us rethink, in so many ways, how we live and how we want to live.

It has starkly reminded us of the importance of having a decent, safe and secure home with access to green spaces in which people can exercise, relax and unwind.

That is especially the case for social housing and the millions of people who call it home.

As many of you will know, on Tuesday 17 November 2020, we published our [Social housing white paper: the charter for social housing residents](#).

Developed in consultation with residents across the country, the white paper will deliver a transformational change for social housing, giving tenants a much stronger voice and re-focusing the sector on its founding ideals.

It empowers residents through quicker redress and more meaningful regulation that allows residents to see how their landlord is performing on the measures that matter most, including the length of time to action repairs.

It also mandates regular performance inspections of the country's largest landlords.

But the most profound change will be cultural: in the way landlords listen and respond to residents, ensuring they are treated with dignity and respect, with complaints handled promptly and fairly.

I believe it is this change in particular – making sure that the residents' voice is truly heard – which will strongly resonate across all levels of the sector, from board members and senior officers to all those who have daily contact with tenants.

The government is fulfilling its commitment to improve the quality of social housing, but we are also solving the decades-long problem of housing demand consistently outstripping supply.

Our £12.2 billion of investment in affordable housing represents the highest single funding commitment for the sector in over a decade.

That includes our new £11.5 billion Affordable Homes Programme, which will be delivered over 5 years from 2021.

It will provide a real boost to the national housing stock with up to 180,000 new homes, economic conditions permitting.

10% of delivery will also be used to increase the supply of much needed specialist and supported housing too – helping individuals and families who need this kind of housing the most.

But our ambition is for social housing to not only be a safety net, but a ladder that provides residents with more opportunities to own their home.

Around half of the homes delivered through our new Programme will therefore be available for home ownership, and will make use of our new model of Shared Ownership in which we have greatly reduced the minimum initial share people can buy in their property.

This will also introduce a 10-year period for new shared owners where the landlord will cover the cost of any repairs and maintenance.

These are measures which give a people a much greater stake in their own homes and their own communities while helping them build a more equitable and prosperous future.

We recognise, however, that central government programmes can only go so far in delivering the homes this country needs.

And we acknowledge that during these unprecedented times, there are significant financial pressures on councils, holding them back from realising their own housing ambitions.

Which is why, in response to the impacts of COVID-19, we extended the deadline for councils to spend Right to Buy receipts, to help them catch up with spending plans and deliver replacement social housing.

And it is not just councils who are benefitting from our reforms in this area.

Social landlords will also be better off as a result of our longer-term rent deal for 5 years which came into force in April of this year, providing a more stable investment environment to deliver new homes for the future.

The supply of good quality, affordable housing lies at the very heart of this government's mission to unite and level up the country as we recover from this pandemic.

Together, with your support, your passion and your expertise, we will deliver nothing short of a new deal for social housing, ensuring that every social home in this country is decent, safe and secure.

Tenants expect, and deserve, nothing less.

Thank you and enjoy the conference.