

Secretary of State
Ministry of Housing, Communities
& Local Government
2 Marsham Street
London
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1st August 2024

Dear Secretary of State,

Securing the future of council housing

We write to confirm and outline our support for the interim report published last month as commissioned by Southwark Council: ‘Securing the Future of Council Housing’.

As two stock holding authorities within the Greater Brighton and wider Sussex area, Lewes District and Eastbourne Borough Councils have personally experienced the long standing and unacceptable pressures on our Housing Revenue Accounts (HRA), which have had direct impacts on the services delivered to our residents. For too long councils in this country had to fend for themselves during times of unprecedented economic uncertainty and volatility, whilst endeavouring to maintain stock, deliver decarbonisation plans, and increase housing supply.

We are in a national housing crisis. The compound effects of rising homelessness, increased costs of living, an unregulated private sector, and lack of capacity to deliver social housing feed the problem, a cycle which must be broken now through a coming together of the sector. The scope of the problem is well articulated in the interim report led by Southwark Council and resonates strongly with both Lewes and Eastbourne. It is essential that this new government take immediate action to support the five solutions proposed, including the implementation of a more financially sustainable HRA model. It has been encouraging to see the recent changes announced by government, including the temporary flexibilities for the use of Right to Buy receipts, however we must make sure that this goes even further if we are to have any chance of mending this broken housing system.

To that point, we urge that this government goes much further when it comes to the Right to Buy – ending it completely. Since the Right to Buy was launched in the 1980s, the world has changed and, at a time when there is not enough social housing, this policy

continues to further reduce the stock councils do have. There are other ways of supporting low-cost homeownership, which would not see a reduction to much-needed council housing, and these options should be explored further.

Alongside the ‘Securing the Future of Council Housing’ interim report, Lewes and Eastbourne propose additional, complementary solutions that should also be considered by this government reflecting our local priorities and outlined as follows:

1. Implement a more effective, responsive, and robust temporary housing model

Recommendation 1: Government should extend the remit of the HRA to include for new alternative forms of temporary accommodation to help relieve pressures on councils and in the context of the national housing crisis.

Recommendation 2: Government should allow full recovery of the current Local Housing Allowance, removing the unrealistic and prohibitive benefit cap currently in place, enabling councils to more sustainably finance the cost of homelessness.

Recommendation 3: Government should extend capital funding to support the model, to include both: a) investment in land, enabling short-term (temporary) housing as well as futureproofing for longer-term (permanent) housing, and b) investment in delivery – innovating new temporary housing solutions that both respond to the crisis and help to regenerate brownfield sites.

2. Bridge the gap between housing, health and social care

Recommendation 1: Government should target support for specialist new build homes that respond to local care and support needs in-line with area-based housing, health and social care strategies.

Recommendation 2: Government should extend grant funding and low-cost financing options to further new supported housing schemes and where an overall reduction in a cost to the sector can be demonstrated.

Recommendation 3: Government should review the current rules and restrictions on councils being able to deliver financially viable supported housing and care schemes, which currently only allow the private sector to intervene, profit, and (in many instances) deliver poor quality services.

3. Enable collaborative and accelerated housing retrofit and decarbonisation programmes

Recommendation 1: Government should ensure the retrofit and decarbonisation of council homes remains a high and immediate priority, supported and underpinned by a more robust new Green and Decent Homes Programme.

Recommendation 2: Government should incentivise councils to work together more collaboratively to deliver innovative new retrofit partnerships, realising savings and efficiencies through design, procurement, and delivery.

Recommendation 3: Government should provide support and capacity funding to enable more collaborative partnerships between councils and the wider public sector for retrofit and decarbonisation, recognising the benefits of “working together” – particularly across a wider geographical (social housing) area.

Lewes District and Eastbourne Borough Councils will be joining Southwark and other councils involved in their efforts to see an overhauled system underpinning our HRAs and

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the improved delivery of services toward creating more thriving homes, places, and communities.

We hope that you take the time to properly consider both the interim report and the additions as set out within this letter. **There is an opportunity here for central and local government to work better together for local people** – something that we feel strongly and passionately about.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Zoe Nicholson
Leader of Lewes District Council



Councillor Stephen Holt
Leader of Eastbourne Borough Council