

# SHELTER

## **Briefing:** Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Oral Parliamentary Questions

Michael Gove MP will face his first parliamentary questions on Monday 25<sup>th</sup> October as the new Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. Shelter is asking MPs to call on the new Secretary of State to set out his plan to build social housing, his strategy to end rough sleeping for good, and when he will finally bring forward an ambitious Renters' Reform Bill.

### Build more social housing

**Suggested question:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what recent assessment he has made of social house building levels.

#### **Background:**

- In 2019/20, the number of social homes completed in England was 6,644. But the number of social homes that were sold (24,120) or demolished (4,676) was 28,796.
- This means there was a **net loss of 22,152 social homes last year alone, and we have lost nearly half a million social homes since the start of the century.**
- At the same time, there are **more than 1.1 million households on waiting lists for a social home in England.**
- Very little of the Affordable Homes Programme funding goes towards building social housing, which is instead predominantly allocated to homes that cannot reasonably be described as affordable. For example, [Shelter analysis](#) found that only the richest 28% of private renters earn enough to access a [First Home](#) – the government's preferred discounted market tenure.
- Shelter is calling on the government to increase investment in social housing, and **build at least 90,000 social homes a year** to end the housing emergency for good.

#### **Supplementary questions:**

- Every year we lose more social homes than we build. Last year alone, 29,000 social homes were either sold or demolished – and just over 6,000 were built. This is directly fuelling the housing emergency, forcing families into overcrowded, unsuitable homes. Can the Minister tell me how he plans to reverse this trend and start building social homes on the scale we desperately need?
- Currently, the bulk of the Affordable Homes Programme funding goes on homes that are out of reach to even families on average incomes. Shelter analysis found that only the richest 28% of private renters earn enough to access one of the government's new First Homes. If the Minister is committed to levelling up the country, does he agree that must involve building homes that people on low incomes can actually afford to live in?
- There is an overcrowding crisis in social housing that is being fuelled by years of underinvestment. Families spend years unsuccessfully bidding for bigger homes, because we are simply not building enough social homes. Can the Minister let me, and the one million families on social housing waiting lists, know his plans for building the social homes we desperately need?
- The Future Homes Standard will be in place by 2025, meaning all new homes will have to be compliant with net zero. This is a hugely important step in fighting the climate emergency and should be implemented in a way that is socially equitable. Will the Minister agree to speak to Shelter about investing in a pilot of carbon neutral, climate resilient social homes?



## Renters' Reform Bill

**Suggested question:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, how he aims to deliver 'a Better Deal for Renters' in the Renters' Reform Bill.

### Background:

- In the 2019 Queen's Speech the government announced a Renters' Reform Bill, intended to create a 'fairer and more effective rental market'. The government re-announced this in the 2021 Queen's Speech, committing to a 'Better Deal for Renters'. A White Paper was promised this autumn.
- The government first promised to scrap Section 21 'no fault' evictions back in 2019 but are yet to deliver. **In removing Section 21, it is crucial that the government does not allow landlords to simply create new avenues to evict tenants** where landlords do not have to prove a legitimate reason for doing so. **Loss of a private tenancy (often likely through Section 21) has been a leading cause of homelessness** for the past 10 years.
- Current legislation affecting the PRS is out of date and no longer adequate - the sector is now home to all types of households who have no other choice of tenure. The balance of power between landlords and tenants must finally be addressed for England's 11 million renters who feel left-behind and powerless in overpriced, substandard homes, unable to challenge bad landlord or agents due to fear of eviction.
- **To improve standards in rented accommodation, a national register must be introduced for landlords and agents.** England is the only country in the UK which does not have a register. This would improve accountability in the sector and facilitate effective enforcement against rogue operators.

### Supplementary questions:

- The private rented sector has doubled in size since the last comprehensive piece of legislation was introduced for the sector back in the 80s. It can no longer be claimed that renting is a choice, or a short-term option. When will the Secretary of State bring forward the promised Renters' Reform Bill to update the sector and improve standards for the 11 million renters that live in it?
- Recent research from Shelter showed that 45% of private renters have been victim to illegal acts committed by their landlord or agent. England is the one nation in the UK which does not currently have a register for landlords and letting agents. A register could be used to improve accountability and standards across the sector, highlighting good landlords and identifying the bad. Will the Secretary of State commit to developing a national register for landlords and agents to ensure those bad operators can be held to account?
- Section 21 'no fault' evictions undermine renters' sense of security in the place they call home. The government have been promising to scrap these 'no fault' evictions since 2019. Can the Secretary of State assure England's 11 million renters that he will deliver on the promise to scrap Section 21, and ensure no other route is created for renters to be evicted without good reason and evidence to support it?
- The Regulation of Property Agents working group reported in 2019 with recommendations to improve practice. Surely the upcoming Renters' Reform Bill, cannot seek to improve the balance between renter and landlord without also addressing accountability for letting agents? When will the Secretary of State commit to introducing these recommendations for the lettings industry?



## Protect street homeless people

**Suggested question:** What progress his department has made in forming a strategy to end rough sleeping by 2024.

### Background:

- The 2019 Conservative Party manifesto pledged to end rough sleeping by the end of this Parliament.
- Government state that **37,000 people have been helped under 'Everyone In'**, with 26,000 helped into longer-term accommodation.
- But [recent research by Shelter](#) found that **fewer than 1 in 4 (23%) people had moved into settled accommodation** of at least six months.
- To protect lives, both during the ongoing pandemic and beyond, the government must have a strategy that learns lessons from 'Everyone In', including a thorough review of outcomes for those helped, and set out a roadmap to end rough sleeping.

### Supplementary questions:

- Recent research by Shelter found that fewer than 1 in 4 people helped under Everyone In have been moved into settled accommodation. Will the Minister collate, publish and analyse more robust and detailed statistics on the outcomes of those helped under 'Everyone In' so that the effectiveness of the emergency funding can be properly assessed?
- The government's 'Everyone In' approach proved that, with political will and adequate funding, everyone at risk of sleeping rough can quickly be offered the accommodation and support. But to make sure that good work is not undone, will the Minister set out a roadmap that will protect those still at risk, tackle rent arrears accumulated during lockdowns, and invest in a new generation of social housing aimed at preventing homelessness?
- Many people who face street homelessness have no recourse to public funds. When facing homelessness, there is a process for the condition to be lifted from their visas. But it can take many months just to prepare an application, never mind waiting for a decision. This is not an adequate route to destitution relief. Will the Minister work with his colleague the Home Secretary to speed up this process so that we can reduce the number of people sleeping rough on our streets?

