



Briefing: the slow pace of social rent home delivery

Summary of Shelter research:

- Social rent homes currently make up just 6% of homes delivered in England, compared to 52% between 1945 and 1970.
- Delivery of social rent homes has dropped 69% in 15 years, with just 12,198 delivered in 2024-25.
- In the last two years, 60 local authority districts (20%) saw no new social rent homes delivered, while a further 29 (10%) saw between one and five.
- In contrast to previous generations, very few local authorities currently deliver social rent homes. In the last year, 209 local authorities (71%) delivered no new homes, and over the last five years more than half (152, or 51%) delivered nothing.
- It would take 119 years to provide a new social rent home to all households currently on England's waiting list.

Our new analysis reveals the slow pace at which social rent homes are being delivered across England, as well as the dramatically reduced role played by councils compared to the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Our findings underline the need for a sea change to deliver 90,000 social rent homes each year for 10 years and end the housing emergency.

The research emphasises the need for urgent action by central government to get councils building again. Key steps include removing historic debt from councils' housing revenue accounts; unlocking low-cost financing for council housebuilding; supporting councils to use

compulsory purchase orders; supporting councils in acquiring empty homes; and making council delivery a priority at all levels of government.

Delivery of social rent homes in England is at a historic low

Historically, social rent homes made up a huge proportion of overall housing delivery.ⁱ Between 1945 and 1970, social rent homes delivered by local authorities comprised 52% of all new homes. During the 1960s, local authorities delivered an average of over 120,000 social rent homes per year. This declined significantly in the 1980s and has remained low ever since, with homes delivered by local authorities and housing associations never again rising above 25% of overall delivery, and dropping as low as 9% in 2003.

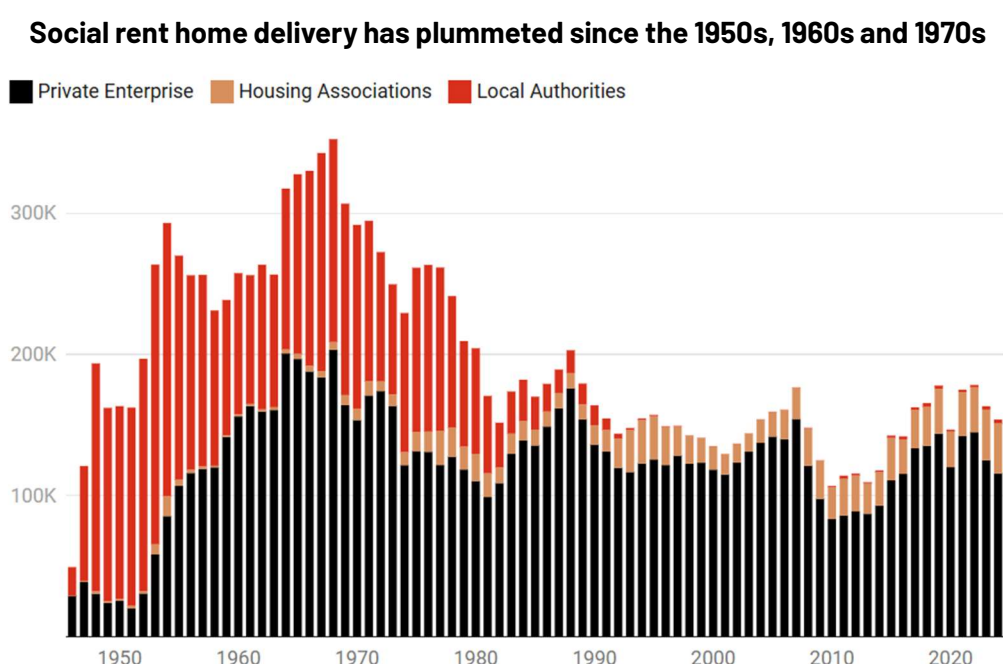


Figure 1 – permanent dwellings delivered in England since 1946ⁱⁱ
MHCLG, [Live tables on housing supply: indicators of new supply](#), Table 244

It is against this backdrop that we conducted research into current levels of social rent home delivery. Social rent homes are genuinely affordable by design, because rents are calculated using a formula which includes local incomes. They are the only homes that can end homelessness and are vital in ensuring everyone has a foundation to thrive.

Using data from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), we examined delivery rates of social rent homes across England, revealing a steep decline since 2010.ⁱⁱⁱ Delivery occurs when a social rent home is built or when a pre-existing property is ‘acquired’ for social rent – for example, where it is purchased from private stock, or where an empty property is rehabilitated and brought back into use.

Delivery of social rent homes in England has significantly reduced over the last 14 years. Figure 2 shows that while 39,562 social rent homes were delivered during 2010-11, by 2024-25 this had fallen to 12,198 – a drop of 69%. Although this is an increase from the low point of 5,827 in 2016-17, it remains well below the 90,000 social homes needed annually for 10 years to address the housing emergency.

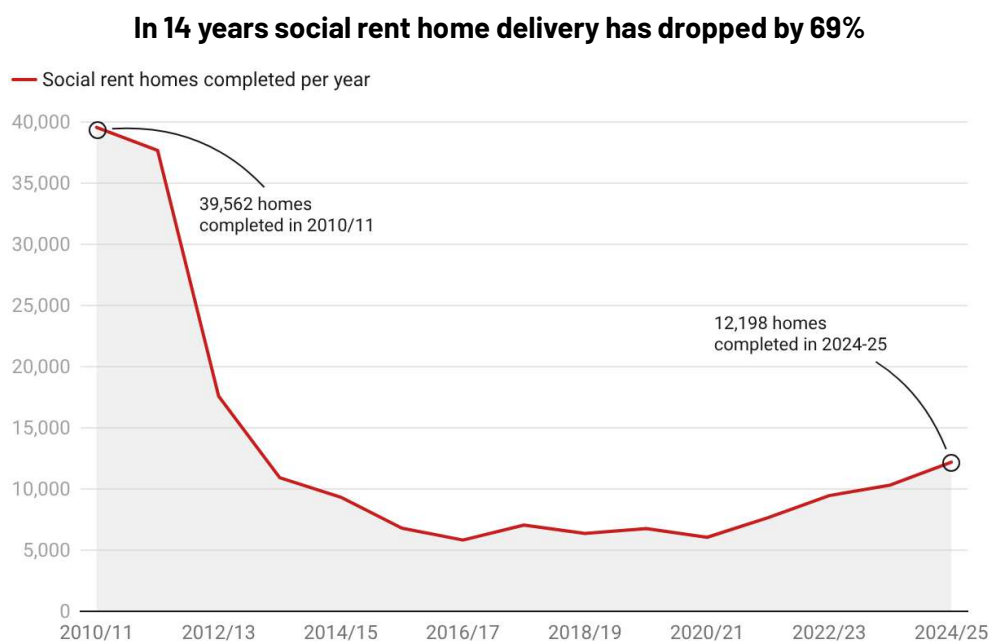


Figure 2 – social rent homes delivered annually in England since 2010/11^{iv}
MHCLG, [Live tables on affordable housing supply](#), Affordable housing supply open data

This drop in social rent home deliveries coincides with a growth in the delivery of so-called ‘affordable rent’ homes – a form of social housing introduced in 2011 with rents set at 80% of the market rent. Our previous research has shown that, in contrast to social rent homes, affordable rent homes are unaffordable to many people on low pay, meaning that this tenure cannot adequately address the housing emergency.^v

The rules on central government grant funding changed in 2011 so that affordable rent homes and shared ownership were prioritised over social rent, leading to a collapse in the delivery of genuinely affordable social housing, illustrated by Figure 3.

The collapse in social rent home delivery coincided with the prioritisation of so-called affordable rent homes

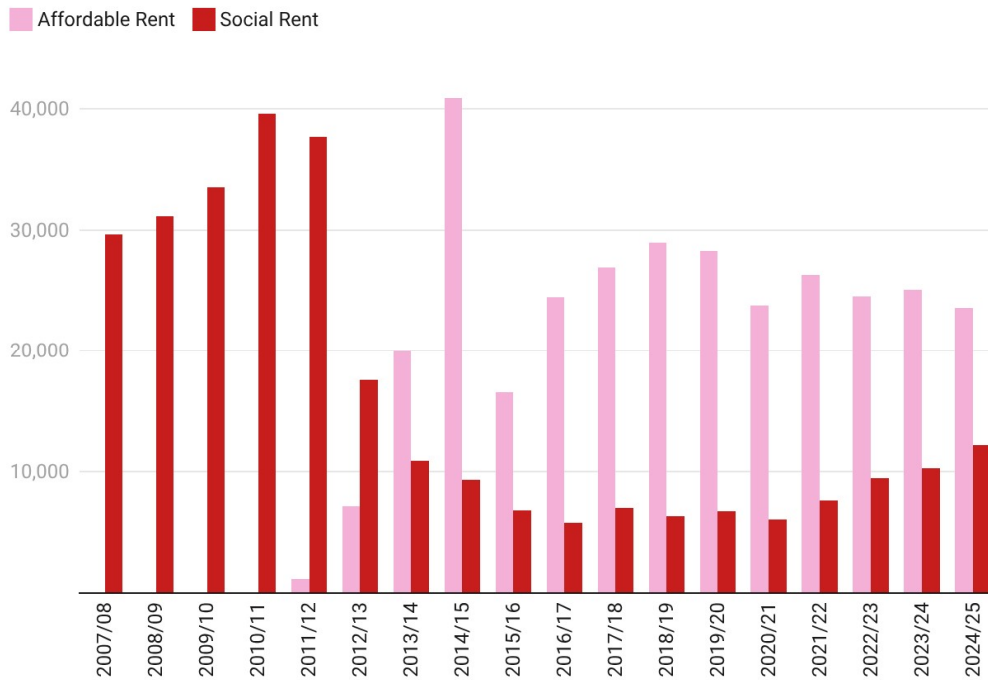


Figure 3 – the annual delivery mix of affordable and social rent homes^{vi}
MHCLG, [Live tables on affordable housing supply](#), Affordable housing supply open data

Delivery rates are low in numerous local authority districts

Our research revealed chronic low levels of delivery in many local authority districts. We disaggregated the MHCLG data by local authority district, provider (e.g. local authorities, housing associations, and other providers of social housing) and delivery method (new build or acquisition). Our goal was to create a clear picture of the state of social home delivery across the country. To do this, we looked at delivery by all providers and placed districts into brackets (e.g. those with no delivery, those where one to 10 homes were delivered, etc).

We found that in the last year, out of 296 districts, 86 (29%) saw no new social rent homes delivered. A further 53 (18%) saw 10 or fewer delivered. Even taking a longer-term perspective, recognising that house building is a process that takes time, the numbers remain low. Over the last two years, 60 local authority districts (20%) have seen no new social rent homes, and over five years, 29 districts (10%) have seen none. Over the last decade, most local authority districts (184, or 62%) have had 200 or fewer social rent homes delivered in that time – an average of 20 homes or fewer per year.

47% of local authority districts saw 10 or fewer social rent homes delivered in the last year

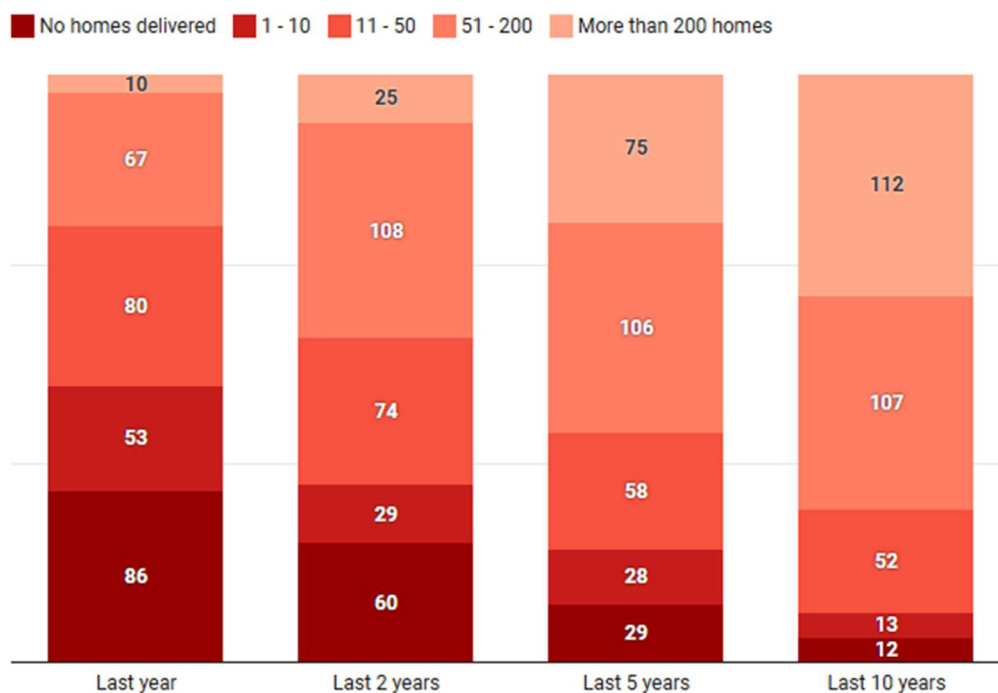


Figure 4 – social rent home delivery within local authority districts, over different time periods^{vii}

MHCLG, [Live tables on affordable housing supply](#), Affordable housing supply open data

The last time we built genuinely affordable homes at the scale now required in England, local authorities were the driving force, delivering an average of 120,104 social homes per year during the 1960s. As Figure 1 indicates, most of the decline in housebuilding since 1980 is due to the loss of council building. Our policy briefing, 'Roadmap to the future of council homes', has set out the steps needed to get councils delivering social homes at scale again.^{viii}

Our analysis showed that direct delivery from local councils is currently extremely low and has been for many years. Figure 5 shows that in the last year, 209 local authorities (71%) delivered no social rent homes at all, dropping to 182 (61%) over the last two years, 152 (51%) over five years, and 127 (43%) over 10 years. Nearly three-quarters of local authorities (219, or 74%) have delivered 50 or fewer social homes in the last decade – an average delivery rate of five per year.

Over 50% of local authorities have delivered no social rent homes in 5 years

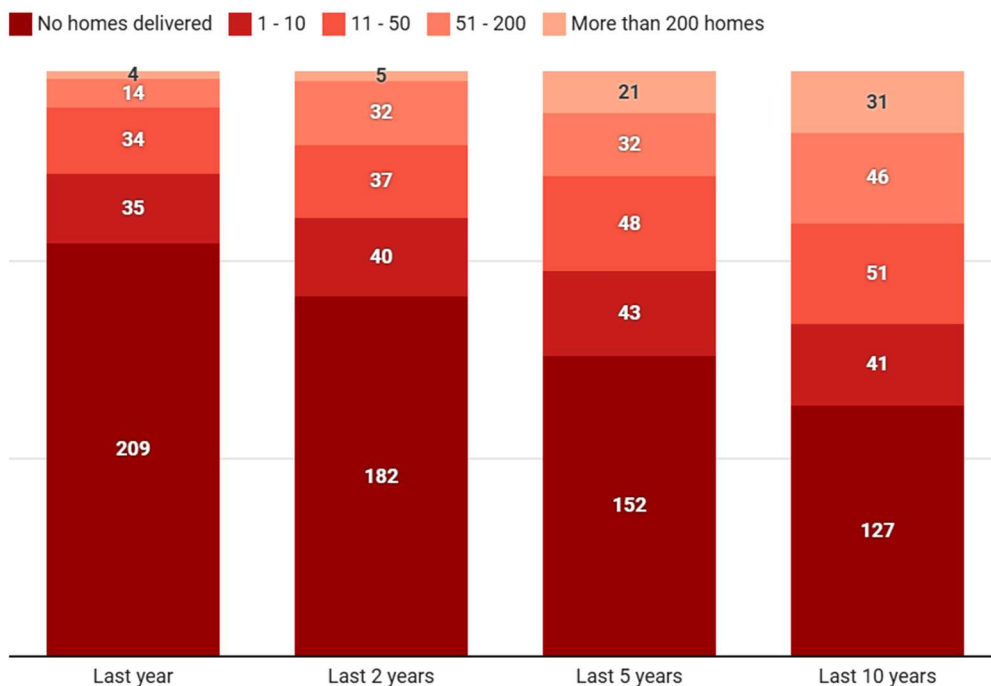


Figure 5 – social rent home delivery by local authorities, over different time periods^x
MHCLG, [Live tables on affordable housing supply](#), Affordable housing supply open data

Delivery falls far short of need

We have calculated that it would take 119 years to provide a new social rent home to every household currently on England’s local authority waiting list. To reach this figure, we compared average delivery rates by all providers over the most recent two years (11,259 per year) with the waiting list, which stood at 1,340,435 households in 2025.

This figure demonstrates the considerable gap between what is required and what is provided. The analysis does not account for other factors that affect the waiting list and people’s time spent on it. Principally, under the Localism Act 2011, local authorities can set their own criteria for entry onto the waiting list, and when this power is exercised it results in households being moved off.

Additionally, not everyone on the waiting list needs a newly delivered social rent home. Some households on the list are already living in social housing but need a different type of home – for example, a more accessible property. Allocating them a suitable home would free up their existing home, thereby removing two households from the list.

Our figure of 119 years is not a prediction of when waiting lists will be cleared; rather, it illustrates the inadequacy of current delivery levels and the entrenched nature of the housing emergency.

Using waiting list data as a proxy for need allowed us to assess delivery in the different regions of England. We broke down waiting list data and social home delivery data by region. Figure 6 illustrates that while delivery is failing to meet need across the country, the problem is particularly acute in the north and in London.

Across England's regions there were between 237 and 61 households on the waiting list for each social rent home delivered

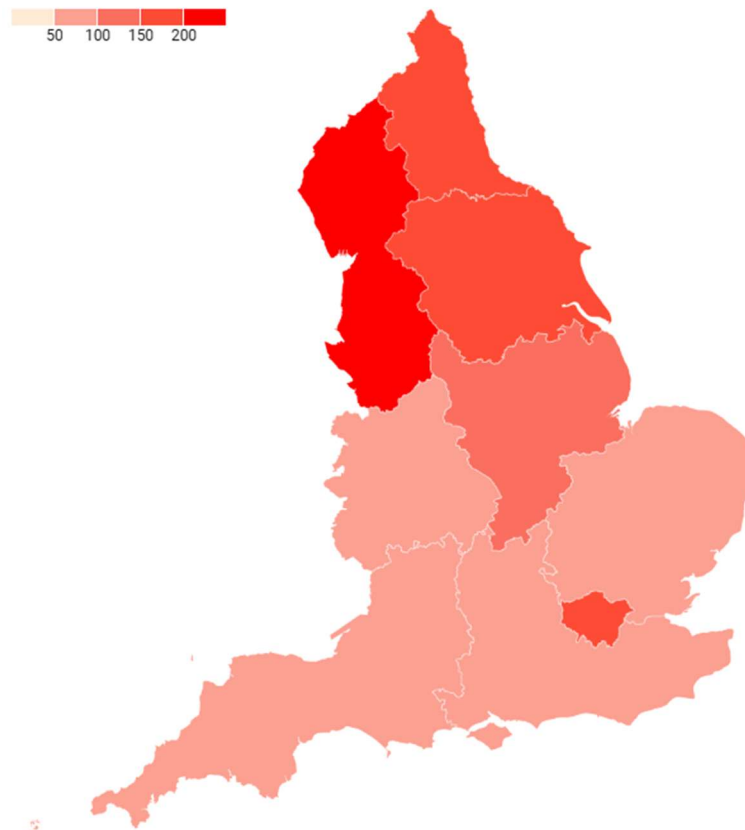


Figure 6 – comparing MHCLG Rents, Lettings and Tenancies, and Affordable Housing Supply data^x
MHCLG, [Live tables on affordable housing supply](#), Affordable housing supply open data

In the North West, there were 237 households on the waiting list in 2024–25 for every one of the 887 social rent homes delivered in that period. In London, there were 162 households waiting for each of the 2,105 homes delivered. Even in the West Midlands, which had the lowest levels of unmet need, there were 61 households on the waiting list for every social home delivered (2,081 homes in total).

A council housing revolution is needed

Delivery rates across England remain painfully low and are woefully insufficient to meet the scale of the housing emergency we face. We are living in a period in which social rent homes are delivered by the handful and yet the waiting list for them stands at over 1.3 million households.^{xi}

Our research has revealed that delivery of social rent homes by all providers is sluggish, but particularly among local authorities. In contrast to the central role they played in housebuilding during the period of post-war reconstruction, most are now delivering a minuscule amount of social rent homes each year.

Delivery rates of social rent homes have risen since 2016-17, when just 5,827 homes were delivered, but the 12,198 homes delivered in 2024-25 are nowhere near the 90,000 that are needed every year for 10 years to end the housing emergency. Nothing short of a revolution in social housebuilding is required, including a radical increase in the delivery of social rent homes by local authorities.

The government is taking steps in the right direction, with the new Social and Affordable Homes Programme and changes to the rules on the Right to Buy, but further structural action is needed to remove barriers and get local authorities building social rent homes. Local authorities know their communities and, given the chance, can build the right homes in the right places to lift thousands of families out of temporary accommodation and many more households out of unsuitable homes or housing cost-induced poverty. With the right support and powers, local authorities could ramp up to delivering 34,000 of the 90,000 social rent homes a year we need through both new build and acquisition of existing homes.^{xii} A council housing revolution is possible^{xiii} and urgently needed.

Sources

ⁱ MHCLG, [Live tables on housing supply: indicators of new supply](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-house-building), Table 244, accessed 24 April 2026, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-house-building>. Chart created with [Datawrapper](https://www.datawrapper.de/_/YjwIL/?v=3)https://www.datawrapper.de/_/YjwIL/?v=3.

ⁱⁱ MHCLG, [Live tables on housing supply: indicators of new supply](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-house-building), Table 244, accessed 24 April 2026, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-house-building>. Chart created with [Datawrapper](https://www.datawrapper.de/_/YjwIL/?v=3)https://www.datawrapper.de/_/YjwIL/?v=3.

ⁱⁱⁱ MHCLG, [Live tables on affordable housing supply](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-affordable-housing-supply), Affordable housing supply open data, accessed 24 April 2026, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-affordable-housing-supply>.

^{iv} MHCLG, [Live tables on affordable housing supply](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-affordable-housing-supply), Affordable housing supply open data, accessed 24 April 2026, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-affordable-housing-supply>. Chart created with [Datawrapper](https://www.datawrapper.de/_/YjwIL/?v=3).

^v Matthews, W., Briefing: affordable rent is not affordable, Shelter, May 2025, https://england.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_and_research/policy_library/briefing_affordable_rent_is_not_affordable.

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^{vii} MHCLG, [Live tables on affordable housing supply](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-affordable-housing-supply), Affordable housing supply open data, accessed 24 April 2026, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-affordable-housing-supply>. Chart created with [Datawrapper](https://www.datawrapper.de/_/YjwIL/?v=3).

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- viii Berry, C., Roadmap to the future of council homes, Shelter, April 2026, https://england.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_and_research/policy_library/briefing_roadmap_to_the_future_of_council_homes.
- ix MHCLG, [Live tables on affordable housing supply](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-affordable-housing-supply), Affordable housing supply open data, accessed 24 April 2026, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-affordable-housing-supply>. Chart created with [Datawrapper](#).
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- xiii Berry, C., Roadmap to the future of council homes, Shelter, April 2026, https://england.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_and_research/policy_library/briefing_roadmap_to_the_future_of_council_homes.