

Shelter Briefing: Queen's Speech debate on affordable and safe housing

Shelter is the UK's largest housing and homelessness charity. Throughout the pandemic we have continued to give support and advice to millions of people struggling with bad housing and homelessness.

Last week, the Queen's Speech outlined the government's legislative agenda for the year ahead. This was a major opportunity for the government to detail its plans to tackle the housing emergency as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic. While there were promising commitments on renters' rights with the government recommitting to the Renters' Reform Bill, there was unfortunately little detail on how its planning system reforms will deliver social housing on the scale we desperately need.

In order to end the housing emergency, and lift millions out of bad housing and homelessness, the government must:

1. **Invest in social housing** and ensure that reforms introduced to the planning system deliver much more social rented housing than the current system. The government must back this up with the investment needed to scale up delivery of social housing across the country.
2. **Give security to private renters**, by delivering the Renters' Reform Bill and finally putting an end to Section 21 "no fault" evictions. Shelter welcomed the government's recommitment to this in the Queen's Speech, but the government must also take immediate action to support renters that have fallen into arrears during the pandemic.
3. **Improve standards in social rented housing**, by bringing forward long overdue reforms to the regulation of social housing with dedicated legislation. The government must fulfil its promise to implement last year's Social Housing White Paper, by bringing forward a Social Housing Bill within this parliamentary session.

Planning Bill and Levelling Up White Paper: Social housing must be at the heart

What was announced

As expected, the government announced plans to introduce a Planning Bill following its White Paper last year. The government has said it wants to "modernise the planning system" and "ensure homes and infrastructure...can be delivered more quickly across England". The government also announced that it will publish a Levelling Up White Paper, in which it intends to improve livelihoods and opportunities across all parts of the UK. Jobs, businesses and economic growth were mentioned as part of this strategy, but if the government is serious about driving up living standards across the country, addressing the housing emergency must be at its heart and investment in social housing is vital to this end.

Last year, the Planning White Paper proposed to replace [Section 106](#) and the Community Infrastructure Levy with a new Consolidated Infrastructure Levy. The government promised that reforms to the planning system will lead to the delivery of "at least" as much affordable housing. However, over the last five years social homebuilding has averaged less than 6,500 homes a year, which is less than 10% of the amount that is needed. Delivering "at least" as many social homes is simply not good enough.

What we need to see

In order to tackle the housing emergency, we need to scale up social housing delivery across the country and provide decent, affordable homes to the millions who are either homeless or trapped in bad housing. In our [response](#) to the Planning White Paper, we detailed how the new Infrastructure Levy could threaten existing social housing delivery and that any reforms must deliver much more social housing than the current system. To our knowledge the government has not made any assessment of the impact that the new Infrastructure Levy will have on social housing delivery. It must undertake this urgently. **The government must produce detail on how the reforms will deliver social housing on the scale we**

need before the legislative process begins. The government should adopt a 'test and learn' approach, piloting these changes in certain parts of the country to understand the impact.

Reforms to the planning system alone cannot deliver enough social housing to meet the growing need across the country. **The government must also substantially increase capital investment in social housing.** [An investment of £12.8 billion a year over ten years would annually deliver 90,000 social rented homes](#), which are desperately needed to break the back of our housing emergency.

Social Housing Bill: Bring forward reforms within this parliamentary session

What was announced

The government previously committed to introduce legislation to significantly improve the regulation of social housing, and last year its Social Housing White Paper, *The Charter for Social Housing Residents*, was [welcomed](#) by Shelter. Unfortunately, the government did not use the Queen's Speech to confirm that it would be implementing legislation within this parliamentary session as expected. Instead, the government has said it will "legislate as soon as practicable", and commitment to a Social Housing Bill was a concerning omission from the Queen's Speech.

What we need to see

It has been nearly four years since the fire at Grenfell Tower. Social renters have been waiting too long for these vital changes. The Regulator and the Ombudsman cannot begin developing an effective regulatory regime without important changes to the law, as promised in last year's Social Housing White Paper. **The government must not delay any longer and bring forward a Social Housing Bill within this parliamentary session.**

Renters' Reform Bill: Provide security and drive up standards in the private rented sector

What was announced

In 2019, the government promised to abolish Section 21 "no fault" evictions and introduce a Renters' Reform Bill. Shelter welcomed the recommitment to the Bill in this year's Queen's Speech. The government committed to "enhancing the rights of those who rent": the announcements included reforms to drive up standards in private rented properties, a reaffirmed commitment to end Section 21 "no fault" evictions, and proposals to consult on introducing a landlord register. A White Paper will be published in the autumn, detailing the reform package, and legislation will follow afterwards.

What we need to see

In the past twenty years, the private rented sector has doubled in size, while legislation has not kept up. Families and older people are struggling in privately rented homes that offer little security or routes to redress when things go wrong. It is now crucial that the government delivers its promised package of reforms which will provide private renters with security in their homes, as well as driving up standards in the sector. **Shelter welcomes the announcements in the Queen's Speech, including the government's commitment to publish a White Paper ahead of introducing a bill.** The Renters' Reform Bill will be a landmark piece of essential legislation, and it is important that the government takes the time to get these reforms right, by consulting with the sector and outlining its plans in a White Paper before introducing legislation.

While it is important that the government does not rush these vital long-term reforms, it must take immediate action to support renters that have been struggling during the pandemic. At least half a million private renters have fallen into rent arrears due to the economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis. **Shelter has called on the government to bring forward a targeted financial package to help renters pay off arrears built up during the pandemic.** This will help to sustain existing tenancies and keep renters in their homes – whilst also ensuring rental debt does not risk them finding homes in the future.

For more information on this briefing, please contact reshima_sharma@shelter.org.uk.

The logo for Shelter, featuring the word "Shelter" in white, lowercase letters on a red rectangular background.