

Date: Wednesday 17 July 2024



Rt Hon Angela Rayner MP
Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State
Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government
2 Marsham Street
LONDON
SW1P 4DF

Dear Secretary of State

Perfect storm besets social housing

Congratulations on your new role as our Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

I know you are familiar with the perfect storm of issues besetting social housing across the country and my own district of Canterbury in Kent is no different.

We have:

- a Housing Needs Register of around 3,000 waiting for secure, warm and affordable homes
- an aging housing stock of more than 5,000 properties
- increasing numbers in temporary accommodation, many people being housed outside the district
- increasing demand
- soaring private rents
- several years of capital debt repayments

In light of all of this, our Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is euphemistically described as 'fragile'.

Despite the best endeavours of our excellent local housing officers and a Labour and Lib Dem administration that has put decent, affordable homes for local people at the heart of its mission, we are fighting to stand still, unable to make the improvements necessary to reverse the decline in our social housing stock.

continued/

Grassroots solutions have been identified by those on the ground who wrestle with the issues daily and I commend the recommendations contained in the attached report Securing the Future of Council Housing -

<https://www.southwark.gov.uk/assets/attach/279027/Securing-the-Future-of-Council-Housing-Interim-Report.pdf>. I outline them below.

I am asking the government for an immediate commitment to restoring confidence after years of uncertainty alongside an emergency capital funding injection.

This will stabilise our HRA and prevent further waste caused by delaying or cancelling investment plans.

Then, at the next spending review, the government should:

- 1) establish a new fair and sustainable HRA model: including a long-term and certain rent-settlement, an adjustment of HRA debts and more favourable conditions for council investment.
- 2) reform unsustainable Right to Buy policies: by reducing discount levels and eligibility, as well as protecting newly-built council homes from sale.
- 3) remove red tape on the Affordable Homes Programme and other funds: including extending the strategic partnership model to councils. Funding should be streamlined, allocated simply, reflect recent cost inflation and be allowed to be used flexibly to meet local housing need.
- 4) announce a Green and Decent Homes Programme: a long-term capital funded programme to bring all council housing up to the new standard of safety, decency and energy efficiency by 2030 – and a road map for achieving net zero by 2050.
- 5) pay for the completion of new council homes: limit the short-term loss of housing supply and construction sector capacity caused by the unfolding market downturn, by funding councils to rescue and complete stalled housing developments

I hope you will be able to find a way to take these points on board. Of course, I would be more than willing to meet to explain the issues in person.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Pip Hazelton
Labour Councillor
Cabinet Lead for Housing at Canterbury City Council