

Improving neighbourhoods and making best use of existing homes

4.39 As we focus on increasing overall housing supply we want to make sure that best use is made of both new and existing homes, benefitting local communities and supporting growing economies. Some communities are particularly concerned about second homes, and others about properties being left empty and abandoned. It can be deeply frustrating for local people to see homes under-used in their neighbourhood when they themselves might be struggling to afford to meet their housing needs.

4.40 People are entitled to own a second home, but in the context of significant pressures on the supply of homes it is right that they make an additional contribution to help meet housing need. From last April, higher rates of Stamp Duty Land Tax have been payable on purchases of additional residential properties, including second homes. Some of the additional receipts are being used to form **our new Community Housing Fund, which is supporting communities to take the lead in developing homes, including in areas particularly affected by second homes. We will consider whether any additional measures are needed.**

Empty homes

4.41 **We will also continue to support local authorities to encourage efficient use of our existing stock, making best use of homes that are long-term empty.** Local authorities have powers and incentives to tackle empty homes. Through the New Homes Bonus they earn the same financial reward for bringing an empty home back into use as building a new one. They also have flexibility to impose a council tax premium of up to 50% (on top of the council tax bill), on properties that have been empty and substantially unfurnished for more than two years. Great progress has been made in recent years and the number of empty homes stands at its lowest since records began. At May 2010 over 300,000 homes in England had been standing empty for longer than 6 months. As of October 2015 the number of long-term empty properties had fallen to 204,000.⁸¹

Housing for our future population

4.42 Offering older people a better choice of accommodation can help them to live independently for longer and help reduce costs to the social care and health systems. We have already put in place a framework linking planning policy and building regulations to improve delivery of accessible housing. To ensure that there is more consistent delivery of accessible housing, **the Government is introducing a new statutory duty through the Neighbourhood Planning Bill on the Secretary of State to produce guidance for local planning authorities on how their local development documents should meet the housing needs of older and disabled people.** Guidance produced under this duty will place clearer expectations about planning to meet the needs of older people, including supporting the development of such homes near local services⁸². It will also set a clear expectation that all planning authorities should set policies using the Optional Building Regulations to bring forward an adequate supply of accessible housing to meet local need. In addition, we will explore ways to stimulate the market to deliver new homes for older people.

4.43 Helping older people to move at the right time and in the right way could also help their quality of life at the same time as freeing up more homes for other buyers. However there are many barriers to people moving out of family homes that they may have lived in for decades. There are costs, such as fees, and the moving process can be difficult. And they may have a strong emotional attachment to their home which means that where they are moving to needs to be very attractive to them and suitable for their needs over a twenty to thirty year period. There is also often a desire to be close to friends and family, so the issues are not straightforward.

4.44 The Government is committed to exploring these issues further and finding sustainable solutions to any problems that come to light. To do this we will draw on the expertise of a wide range of stakeholders including housebuilders (both specialist and mainstream); mortgage lenders; clinical commissioning groups; housing associations and

81 DCLG Live Table 615 - All long-term vacant dwellings by local authority district, England, from 2004

82 The Local Government Association is looking at these issues: http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/7632544/5.5+Housing+commission_v12_compressed+WEB.pdf/ea3bad67-4c85-423f-aa45-f07888ff0fc5

local authorities; and most importantly older people and the groups that represent them. **We want to build on the evidence that already exists to help deliver outcomes that are best for older people.**⁸³

This conversation will generate a range of ideas for incentives and other innovations for the Government to consider: improved information and advice for older people about housing choices, including advice on adaptations; supporting custom build for older people; looking at how community living could work; as well as innovative models of housing with support available. These will sit alongside the Government commitments to fund and develop supported housing, including sheltered, step down and extra care housing, ensuring that the new supported housing funding model continues to provide the means for older people to live independently for longer while relieving pressure on the adult social care system.

Supported housing

4.45 Supported housing plays an important role in helping hundreds of thousands of vulnerable people to live independently or turn their lives around. The Government is committed to encouraging further development to meet future demand.

4.46 At the Spending Review, the Government committed £400 million for a further 8,000 supported housing units. Over £200 million more is being invested through the Department of Health's Care and Support Specialised Housing Fund to develop 6,000 more supported homes over the next few years.

4.47 The Government is committed to developing a sustainable and workable approach to funding supported housing which provides value for money and works for those who use it as well as those who pay for it. That is why we have deferred the application of the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates for supported housing until 2019/20, at which point we will bring in a new funding model which will ensure that supported housing continues to be funded at the same level it would have otherwise been in 2019/20, taking account of our plans on social rents.

4.48 We are committed to working with the sector to get the detail right and have published a consultation paper to work up the detailed design of the new funding model. The consultation is running for 12 weeks until 13th February 2017. **The detailed arrangements for implementing the new model and approach to short term accommodation will be set out in a subsequent Green Paper which we will publish this Spring.**

Preventing homelessness

4.49 There are multiple and complex reasons why people become homeless. However, we know that high and increasing costs in the private rented sector can impact upon tenants who struggle to pay, and these households are more likely to be at risk of becoming homeless. Losing a private sector tenancy is now the main cause of homelessness.⁸⁴

4.50 We have a strong safety net, with legislation to support families and the most vulnerable when they become homeless. Our focus now is on ensuring that more people get the help they need before they become homeless, to prevent a crisis from happening in the first place. That is why **the Government is supporting Bob Blackman MP's Homelessness Reduction Bill** which will significantly reform England's homelessness legislation, placing a duty on local authorities to take steps to prevent the homelessness of anyone eligible and threatened with homelessness.

4.51 The legal framework is just one part of the support for households at risk, and we also have an ambitious programme of reform to enable local authorities to prevent or relieve homelessness. Since 2010, we have invested more than £500 million which has helped prevent or relieve over a million cases of homelessness.⁸⁵ In October 2016, we launched a new £40 million programme to drive a shift to homelessness prevention – intervening earlier to prevent homelessness happening in the first place, acting quickly when it does, and helping those rough sleepers with the most complex needs. Going further, at Autumn Statement

83 Future of an ageing population, Government Office for Science, 2016|

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/535187/gs-16-10-future-of-an-ageing-population.pdf

84 DCLG Live Table 774

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