

Safer & Stronger Communities Scrutiny

Policy Update

NOV/DEC 2011

New strategy to deliver homes and strengthen the economy

- An ambitious new strategy to tackle the housing shortage, boost the economy, create jobs and give people the opportunity to get on the housing ladder was announced on 21 November by the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister
- The Government has argued that it has inherited a broken housing market and a devastating collapse in construction from the era of top-down targets. But new plans will give the housing market a shot in the arm by boosting supply, easing financial pressures and helping with demand. The actions in the strategy will drive up the level of housebuilding, ensuring that the Government is helping new home owners and boost consumer confidence
- The strategy will break the current cycle in which lenders won't lend, builders can't build and buyers can't buy. The Government will be making it easier for people to secure mortgages on new homes, help people get on the property ladder, address unfairness in social housing and ensure homes that have been left empty for years are lived in once again

Help for home buyers

- At the heart of the strategy is a new build indemnity scheme that will give a helping hand for up to 100,000 prospective buyers who are currently frozen out of the housing market because of the need for large deposits
- Under the proposals, homebuyers will be able to secure loans on newly built homes – the bedrock of the first time buyer market – with only a 5% deposit
- The Government and housebuilders will help provide security for the loan, so if the house is then sold for less than the outstanding mortgage total the lender will be able to recover its loss
- Through the scheme lenders will be encouraged to offer mortgages with smaller deposits, increasing demand for new homes and giving a welcome boost to the housing market
- The Government will also consult shortly on proposals to increase discounts under the 'right to buy', giving social tenants the opportunity to buy the homes they live in. the discount will be improved dramatically and will be up to half the value of the home, making home ownership ever more achievable
- For the first time, the receipts from additional right to buy sales will be used to support the funding of new affordable homes for rent on a 'one

for one' basis, which is expected to deliver up to 100,000 new homes and support 200,000 jobs

Help for housebuilders

- Assistance for people buying homes will be matched by support for the people who build them, from the largest housebuilder to people who want to build their own homes
- Affordable housing providers are in line to share almost £1.8bn to develop new affordable homes. The first £1bn worth of contracts under the Affordable Homes Programme have just been confirmed, putting the Government on track to deliver up to 170,000 new affordable homes across the country over the next 4 years
- The Government will give more support for local areas that want to deliver new, larger-scale developments that meet the needs of their growing communities. A new prospectus will be published shortly inviting councils and communities to identify opportunities for locally planned large scale development, which will take advantage of streamlined planning processes, giving communities a stronger say and developers greater certainty
- The new plots could vary in size, from a small expansion of a few hundred homes through to a new market town with up to 10,000 homes. Viable schemes that are sustainable and have strong local support will be given financial assistance to get the work going, and will be prioritised for future infrastructure spending
- Where there are existing building sites that have stalled, a £400m 'Get Britain Building' funding pot will enable housebuilders to restart construction, helping to deliver up to 16,000 new homes on sites that already have planning permission, but have been shut down because of economic conditions
- The new support on offer will also benefit self-builders, an industry often assumed to be out of reach for some, but one that is increasingly popular and already worth £3.6bn to the national economy. The Government has announced £30m additional funding to support provision of short-term project finance on a repayable basis
- Councils will receive support to work with local people and bring forward plans for larger custom-built housing projects
- All these measures will be supported through the New Homes Bonus, which will ensure that those areas which are growing have the resources to meet the needs of their new residents and existing communities.

Improving fairness in social housing

- Efforts to boost the supply of new homes and help homebuyers will be matched by improving fairness for those living in social homes
- Measures in the strategy will support the radical programme of reform to the system for social housing that is already underway. The Government will consult on 'pay to stay' proposals. This will mean that those social tenants on high salaries e.g. household incomes of over

£100,000 a year, will pay up to market rents if they want to continue living in taxpayer-subsidised homes

- Councils will be given new powers to reject applications for social housing from people who own a perfectly acceptable home of their own. And there will be stronger measures to help tackle the outrage of 50,000 unlawfully-occupied social homes, with a more detailed consultation to be published later this year.
- The overly bureaucratic and complex model of council housing finance will be scrapped as well, so councils can manage their social housing stock more effectively
- Instead of the revenue generated from social housing being handed over to central government and redistributed, councils will be able to keep their own receipts, giving them freedom to maintain their housing stock with more efficiency and transparency, in a way that meets local needs.

Support for the private rented sector

- The strategy will also support greater investment in the private rented sector, a sector which accounts for around 16% of all households
- Large scale investment will be driven through changes to the tax rules affecting bulk purchases of buy-to-let homes, as well as through measures to encourage the growth of real estate investment trusts – the globally recognised model for real estate investment that provides low cost access to capital
- An independent review will also consider whether there are barriers to greater large-scale investment in rented housing

Action on empty homes

- The Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister have said that the fact that for years so little has been done to bring the nation's growing number of empty homes back into use is a 'national scandal'
- Tackling the 700,000 empty homes across the country is a top priority in the strategy, and a key feature in the drive to increase the provision of affordable housing
- Housing associations and councils will be able to apply for part of £100m of Government funding to bring empty homes that blight neighbourhoods back into use. The money will be used for innovative housing schemes that will ensure empty properties that ruin neighbourhoods are lived in once again, communities are regenerated and at the same time more affordable housing is provided. Government is also announcing £50m of further funding to tackle some of the worst concentrations of empty homes
- The schemes will be backed by cash rewards through the New Homes Bonus for councils bringing empty homes back into use, and many schemes will also have wider benefits e.g. providing excellent training opportunities for local people

- The Government is also consulting on plans to allow councils local discretion to introduce a council tax premium on homes in their area that have been empty for more than 2 years, to provide a stronger incentive for empty homes owners to bring them back into use

Supporting older people to live independently

- The strategy also focuses on the needs of older people and includes a deal to improve the quality and choice of housing available for older people, which aims to help them to stay independent for longer
- Nearly a third of all homes are occupied by the elderly, and nearly two thirds of the projected increase in the number of households over the next 20 years will be headed by someone aged 65 or over
- So a package of measures will help the elderly adapt their homes, or move into alternative housing, to meet their changing needs. As part of this package the Government will work to develop simple and attractive financial products that help older home owners safely release equity that they can then use to maintain or adapt their homes
- Other reforms set out in the strategy include
 - Transferring housing and planning powers from central government to councils and local people, so that they can shape development in their areas
 - Replacing top down targets with powerful cash incentives through the New Homes Bonus, so instead of simply feeling the strain that new building projects place on existing services, communities have a reason to support new development
 - Supporting private sector growth by reducing regulation and other burdens on house builders
 - Accelerating the release of public sector land with capacity to build up to 100,000 new homes by 2015, and support up to 200,000 construction and related jobs during development

A new era in policing

- One year before Police and Crime Commissioners take office, the Policing Minister has called for all dynamic and driven individuals to come forward as candidates
- PCCs will be directly elected by local communities to be the voice of the people and hold the police to account on behalf of the communities they serve
- They will determine how crime fighting resources are allocated and in many cases be responsible for budgets of tens of millions of pounds. They will determine how much local taxpayers should pay for their police force and, in consultation with their chief constable, decide the priorities for their police force
- They will also appoint, and if necessary dismiss, the chief constable
- These are therefore big jobs for big figures, the Policing Minister has said

- Nick Herbert has set out his vision that PCCs will be made up of people from all walks of life to stand and make a difference for local communities
- Candidates do not have to be politicians to stand and could be independent of political parties
- PCCs represent the most significant democratic reform of policing in a generation
- 41 elected Police and Crime Commissioners in England and Wales will take office in a year's time

Ending gang and youth violence – a cross-government report

- The Government has set out the start of crucial work to tackle gang and youth violence through prevention and tough punishment
- Young people at risk of being drawn into gangs and violence will be targeted at every stage of their lives – from toddlers to teenagers – in a comprehensive approach aimed at preventing the next generation of gang members
- Those who refuse help will be met by the full force of strengthened laws to protect local communities from crime and disorder
- The 5 key principles underpinning the cross-government strategy are:
 - Prevention
 - Pathways out of crime
 - Punishment
 - Partnership working
 - Provision of central support
- The strategy builds on successful work already being undertaken across government and at a local level by police forces, local agencies, charities and voluntary organisations and by young people themselves around the country, many of whom have fed into the development of the strategy

Action set out in the report includes:

- Preventing young people becoming involved in violence in the first place with a new emphasis on early intervention and prevention
 - Deliver existing commitments on early intervention which research shows is the most cost-effective way of reducing violence in later life. The Government will double the capacity of Family Nurse Partnerships, recruit 4200 more health visitors by 2015 and invest over £18m in specialist services to identify and support domestic violence victims and their children who themselves are at particular risk of turning to violence in adulthood
 - Review existing materials on serious youth violence being used in schools
 - Improve the education offered to excluded pupils to reduce their risk of involvement in gang violence and other crime
 - Support parents worried about their children's behaviour by working with a range of family service providers to develop new parent-friendly advice on gangs

- Pathways out of violence and the gang culture for young people wanting to make a break with the past:
 - Continue to promote intensive family intervention work with the most troubled families, including of gang members. Therapy for young people with behavioural problems and their families to 25 sites by 2014
 - Set up a second wave of youth justice liaison and diversion schemes for young offenders at the point of arrest, which identify and target mental health and substance misuse problems. These will be targeted at areas where there is a known and significant gang or youth crime problem
 - Encourage A&E departments to refer all young people under 18 admitted with knife or gang assault wounds to children's social care for safeguarding action and explore the potential for placing youth workers in A&E departments to identify and refer young people at risk of serious violence
 - Support areas, through the ending gang and youth violence team, to roll out schemes to re-house former gang members wanting to exit the gang lifestyle
 - Explore ways to improve education provision for young people in the secure estate and for those released from custody
 - Implement new offending behaviour programmes for violent offenders in prison and under community supervision, including new modules on gang violence
- Punishment and enforcement to suppress the violence of those refusing to exit violent lifestyles:
 - Extend police powers to take out gang injunctions to cover teenagers aged 14-17
 - Implement custodial sentences for people using a knife to threaten or endanger others – including for offenders aged 16 and 17
 - Introduce mandatory life sentences for adult offenders convicted of a second very serious violent or sexual crime
 - Extend the work that the UKBA undertakes with the police using immigration powers to deport dangerous gang members who are not UK citizens
 - Consult on whether the police need additional curfew powers and on the need for, and appropriateness of, a new offence of possession of illegal firearms with intent to supply and on the appropriate penalty for illegal firearm importation
- Partnership working to join up the way local areas respond to gang and other youth violence
 - Issue clear and simple guidelines on data sharing to clarify once and for all the position on what information can be shared between agencies about high risk individuals on a risk aware, not risk averse basis
 - Promote the roll-out of multi-agency safeguarding hubs which co-locate police and other public protection agencies to cut bureaucracy and make it easier to share information and agree actions
 - Deliver on our commitment that all hospital A&E departments share anonymised data on knife and gang assaults with the police and other

- agencies and pilot the feasibility of including A&E data on local crime maps
- Encourage the use of local multi-agency reviews after every gang related homicide to ensure every area learns the lessons of the most tragic cases
 - Providing support to local areas wanting to tackle their gang or serious youth violence problem:
 - Establish an ending gang and youth violence team working with a virtual network of over 100 expert advisers to provide practical advice and support to local areas with a gang or youth violence problem
 - Provide £10m in Home Office funding in 2012/13 to support up to 30 local areas to improve the way mainstream services identify, assess and work with the young people most at risk of serious violence
 - Invest at least £1.2m of additional resource over the next 3 years in improving services for young people under 18 suffering violence in our major urban areas – with a new focus on the girls and young women caught up in gang related rape and abuse

New rules will help end prejudices about social housing

- New flexible tenancies will help end long-held prejudices about social housing and ensure it once again becomes a springboard for success, Housing Minister Grant Shapps has said
- The Minister has said that flexible tenancies will end the lazy and patronising perception that social housing is a dead-end option for life
- The instructions will ensure that councils and housing associations will, for the first time, have genuine freedom to ensure that more people benefit from social housing
- Starting next year, new tenants will now get the helping hand they need for as long as they need it, rather than a single option of a home for life, ensuring more social homes are available to people who need them
- Ministers believe the current system has failed, and are introducing the most radical and fundamental reforms to social housing for a generation
- The new instructions are a key step in delivering that reform, and will make social housing fairer by striking a sensible balance between the needs to new and existing tenants, whose tenancies will not be affected
- The new standards include:
 - Tenure reform: to allow social landlords to issue flexible tenancies, subject to conditions, to make better use of existing and future stock. In implementing these reforms, the Government will respect the rights of existing secure and assured tenants
 - Mutual exchange: to enable access to internet-based mutual exchange schemes to give tenants who want to move the best possible opportunity of finding a match
 - Tenant involvement: to strengthen landlord accountability to tenants and support the tenant cashback model, providing new

- opportunities for social housing tenants to get involved in commissioning repair and maintenance service for their homes
- Rent: to make changes to reflect the introduction of the affordable rent model
- Quality of accommodation: to clarify that providers are expected to maintain their stock at a decent level

Home Secretary outlines plans for new police professional body

- A new police professional body that supports police officers at all ranks and civilian policing professional will be set up next year, the Home Secretary has announced
- The government is clear that the police service must be radically reformed in order to meet growing challenges and deliver the most effective service possible
- The new body will take responsibility for developing professional skills and leadership in the police service. It will act in the public interest and will be a single voice for the police service with a publicly accountable board and independent chairperson
- As part of the government's programme of policing reform, the government is rationalising the landscape of the police service by phasing out the National Policing Improvement Agency (NIPA). This follows consultation with the police service and partners
- Some of the NIPA's critical national services will be moved to the National Crime Agency (NCA) via the Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA). Responsibility for delivering other national services will move to the Home Office