

Shelter APPG on Council House Building

Tpas submission

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Executive Summary

Tpas welcomes this inquiry and strongly supports a renewed national commitment to delivering council homes for social rent. The shortage of genuinely affordable council homes is placing increasing pressure on households, councils and public services while weakening confidence in the housing system.

The principal barriers are well understood: insufficient long-term investment, Housing Revenue Account constraints, the continuing impact of Right to Buy, land and planning challenges, rising construction costs, workforce shortages and policy uncertainty. These barriers must be addressed if councils are to build at the scale the country requires.

However, Tpas believes there is another equally important challenge that receives far less attention: public trust. Delivering more council housing is not simply about finance and planning. It also depends on communities understanding why homes are needed, trusting the organisations delivering them and having meaningful opportunities to influence decisions.

Government has rightly invested in the financial and regulatory infrastructure needed to support housebuilding. Equal attention should now be given to the infrastructure that supports communities—transport, schools, healthcare, green spaces and community facilities alongside meaningful resident engagement and transparent decision-making. Councils that build with communities rather than for communities are more likely to secure support, avoid unnecessary conflict and create successful places.

The next generation of council housing should therefore be built on three foundations: long-term investment, supporting infrastructure and public trust.

About Tpas

Tpas is England's leading tenant engagement organisation. We work with tenants, councils, housing associations and national partners to strengthen resident influence, accountability and service improvement.

Our evidence is drawn from extensive work across England supporting councils and housing providers to improve resident engagement, scrutiny, governance, consumer regulation and organisational culture.



1. The barriers to delivering council home

Tpas recognises the significant financial and structural barriers facing councils. These include:

- long-term uncertainty around rent policy;
- Housing Revenue Account constraints;
- construction inflation
- land availability;
- planning complexity;
- skills shortages;
- loss of development expertise;
- competing investment pressures on existing homes.

Right to Buy continues to undermine efforts to rebuild council housing. In many places councils remain unable to replace homes on a genuine one-for-one basis, resulting in a continuing reduction in the stock of homes for social rent.

Councils are also balancing investment in new homes against essential investment in existing homes, including building safety, Awaab's Law, decent homes, energy efficiency and consumer regulation. Existing tenants need confidence that new development will complement rather than compete with investment in their homes and neighbourhoods.

Alongside these structural barriers sits another challenge: maintaining public confidence in new development. Even where there is broad recognition of housing need, communities often have concerns about infrastructure, services, transport, green space or the long-term impact on neighbourhoods. These concerns are frequently amplified where engagement begins too late or decisions appear predetermined.

2. Building homes requires building trust

Delivering more council homes is not simply an engineering, planning or financial challenge. It is also a challenge of public confidence.

England cannot achieve the scale of council housebuilding it needs without maintaining what might be described as a **public licence to build**. Communities are far more likely to support housing growth when they understand local need, can see the wider public benefits and have genuine opportunities to influence proposals before key decisions are made.

Resident engagement should therefore be viewed as essential delivery infrastructure rather than an optional consultation exercise.



Equally, new homes cannot be considered in isolation from the wider places in which they sit. Successful communities require investment in roads, public transport, schools, healthcare, green spaces, community facilities and digital connectivity alongside new housing. Housing growth should be planned with this wider infrastructure in mind.

There is also an equally important element of community infrastructure. Transparent communication, community development, resident influence and opportunities for ongoing participation help create neighbourhoods where people feel ownership rather than opposition. Investment in relationships is as important as investment in buildings if councils are to secure long-term confidence in housing growth.

3. Resident engagement improves delivery

Our experience demonstrates that meaningful resident engagement improves outcomes throughout the development process.

Early engagement can:

- improve scheme design;
- identify local issues before formal objections arise;
- build understanding of housing need;
- improve accessibility and neighbourhood design;
- reduce complaints;
- strengthen long-term stewardship;
- improve confidence in local decision-making.

Too often engagement takes place after major decisions have already been made. Residents should instead be involved from the earliest stages of considering local housing need, site selection, design principles, neighbourhood impact and future management arrangements.

Existing council tenants should also be recognised as key stakeholders. Many support additional council housing while understandably wanting reassurance that investment in repairs, safety and neighbourhood services will continue alongside new development.

4. Regulation and accountability

The consumer standards provide a strong framework for successful council housing delivery.



Transparency, Influence and Accountability, Neighbourhood and Community, Safety and Quality and the Tenancy Standard all reinforce the importance of involving residents, communicating openly and creating well-managed communities.

Rather than viewing regulation as an additional burden, government should recognise that organisations which engage residents effectively are often better placed to deliver successful development programmes with stronger local support.

5. Recommendations

TPAS recommends that Government should:

1. Provide long-term certainty over investment in council housing.
2. Reform Right to Buy to prevent the continuing net loss of council homes.
3. Increase grant funding for homes for social rent.
4. Provide long-term certainty for Housing Revenue Account business planning.
5. Invest in rebuilding local authority development and housing management capacity.
6. Require every major council housing programme to include a funded resident engagement strategy from the earliest stages of development.
7. Require councils to demonstrate how supporting infrastructure—including transport, schools, healthcare, community facilities, green space and digital connectivity—has been considered alongside new housing.
8. Encourage councils to involve existing tenants, future tenants, leaseholders and neighbouring communities throughout development.
9. Share national best practice demonstrating how resident engagement has improved housing delivery and strengthened community support.
10. Recognise meaningful resident engagement as an essential component of successful council housebuilding rather than a discretionary activity.

Conclusion

England urgently needs more council homes, but it also needs renewed public confidence in how those homes are planned and delivered.

Building homes without the infrastructure that supports communities risks creating places that struggle to win local confidence. Equally, expecting communities to support significant housing growth without meaningful opportunities to shape decisions will make delivery harder, not easier.



Successful council housebuilding depends on three equally important foundations: sustainable investment, the infrastructure that enables communities to thrive and the public trust that gives councils the confidence and legitimacy to deliver.

The next generation of council housing should therefore be built with communities, not simply for them.