LET’S CONVINCE THE GOVERNMENT TO BUILD MORE AFFORDABLE HOMES
Our campaigns
Shelter provides advice and support to around four million people facing bad housing and homelessness every year. We campaign so that one day, nobody will need our help.

Campaigning for policy change is the only way to fix the root causes of homelessness and bad housing. We couldn’t do it without our reliable network of supporters like you.

More affordable homes
Our housing market is broken. It works for the well-off, but most of us are struggling to find an affordable home to rent or buy.

The Chancellor, George Osborne, can fix this. The Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) is coming up in November, when Osborne will announce government budgets for the next five years. It’s his big chance to fix the housing crisis.

We’re urging him to:

- a) Invest in building affordable homes for people to rent or buy
- b) Replace any social homes that are sold.

The power is in his hands. He could fund 125,000 desperately needed affordable homes each year, for the next five years. This will transform our broken housing market, so we are campaigning to make sure it happens.

If no action is taken to build affordable homes, we may end up building expensive homes. If this happens, by the end of this Parliament, a generation of people on average incomes will be trapped in expensive private renting – or their childhood bedrooms.

The CSR is on 25 November. We have until then to make sure George Osborne invests in affordable homes. But we need your help.

The role of our supporters – how you can help
As a Shelter supporter, you’re at the heart of our work. From signing our petitions to meeting with your Member of Parliament (MP), each action you take helps. Together, we’re building a powerful community of people who will take action – because they believe everyone should have a home.

What this toolkit helps you achieve
It has all the tips and tools you need to get involved in this campaign, with advice on:
- Writing a letter to your MP/George Osborne
  page 3
- How to set up a meeting with your MP
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- Calling your MP
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- Writing a letter to your local newspaper
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- Other ways to get involved
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Contacting your MP

The government can fix our housing crisis – that’s why we talk to politicians to make change happen. Politicians tell us that they listen to Shelter because of our many, committed supporters. That’s why you’re so important.

We rely on thousands of people like you to spread the message. Taking local action can mean national change – you can make a difference.

MPs represent their local people; taking their demands to government. Contacting your MP can seem daunting, but it’s easier than most people think. It’s also the most effective way to make your voice heard.

What can my MP do about the issues that concern me?

It’s your MP’s job to make your voice heard in Parliament. They can:

- Vote on issues in Parliament
- Write to the relevant minister or make an appointment to see them
- Ask questions in Parliament (‘Parliamentary Questions’ or PQs) about issues you raise
- Ask for a debate in Parliament. A relevant minister will always attend this debate to respond to your MP on behalf of the government.

For this campaign in particular, we want MPs to write to George Osborne. They should tell him to invest in more affordable homes to rent and buy, and replace any social homes sold off.

We also want supporters to write a letter to George Osborne directly – because he’ll make the final decision on whether invest in more affordable homes.

Who is my MP?

Find out who your local MP is using our local campaigning page.

Or, call the House of Commons Information Office on 020 7219 4272.

How do I contact my MP?

MPs usually have an office in their constituency (your local area), and in Parliament. You can contact them at either office by telephone, letter or email.

Find your MP’s constituency office address and phone number through our local campaigning page.

Writing to your MP/ George Osborne

Handwritten letters really stand out – just think about the last time you received one! Clearly, someone put real time and effort in. That’s what you want your MP to think when they hear from you.

Lots of people contact their MPs about various issues, mostly by email. In an MP’s very busy inbox, a letter is worth ten emails. That’s why we recommend it.

Plus, MPs are more likely to reply to you personally.

MPs only listen to concerns from their constituents, so include your address and postcode in your letter. That way, they also know where to reply.

If you want to write a letter to George Osborne, the same format applies. Please send it to the Treasury at:

George Osborne
The Correspondence and Enquiry Unit
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

There’s a template MP letter in the appendix of this toolkit, as well as a template letter to George Osborne. Feel free to tweak and change them – they’re just guides to get you started.
Meeting your MP

The very best way to influence your MP is at a face-to-face meeting. You can make an appointment to visit your MP by writing, calling or emailing them.

It varies, but MPs tend to spend Monday to Thursday in their Parliamentary office, then Fridays and weekends in their constituency.

Lots of MPs hold regular ‘surgeries’. At these meetings they meet with constituents like you who want to encourage them to act on an important issue like this.

You can organise to see them either on your own, or with other friends, family or colleagues who live in the same constituency. You need to speak to a member of staff to arrange this well in advance. MPs are incredibly busy, so be specific and flexible (if possible) about your availability.

Appointments with MPs normally last 15-20 minutes, and they’re very conversational.

It’s your MP’s job to listen to you, so don’t be nervous! The more people who go and talk to them about the same issue, the more important they’ll realise it is.

When you go and meet with them on behalf of this campaign, take a photo with them and send it to us! It’s a totally normal thing that they’ll be used to, and there will usually be a member of their team around to take the photo for you.

We love to hear from supporters about their meetings with MPs – once you’ve done it, tell us all about it at campaign@shelter.org.uk.

Calling your MP

Calling your MP is a great way to make sure they deal with important issues. It’s best to call their constituency office, as the staff there are your MP’s direct link with the community.

Staff in MPs’ local offices often take a note of the issues that people call them about. They report back to the MP on any particularly important or popular points. The office in Parliament deals more with House of Commons business, so aren’t best placed to help at a local level.

There is an example call script in the appendix of this toolkit, to help you plan what to say.

Remember: you won’t speak to your MP directly, or expected to be an expert on the issue you raise. Instead, you’ll leave a message about something you care about with a member of their staff who lives in your area too.

Preparing to contact your MP

You’re don’t have to be a policy expert, but stats can help highlight your already great points. We’ve included these in a ‘leave-behind’ document at the end of this toolkit, ready for you to print and pass on.

Human stories are a useful addition to (and often more convincing than) facts and figures. If you or someone you know is facing bad housing or homelessness, be honest about that with your MP. Tell them your story.

The housing crisis affects each one of us differently. Your story is likely to stay in your MP’s mind far longer than a statistic.
One of the most important things to remember is to be polite. Homelessness and bad housing are incredibly frustrating, but be respectful, well-informed and ask your MP what they will do about the issue.

**Contacting local newspapers**

Local media is a useful tool for boosting a campaign's message within your community. Local people read the papers – both in print and online – including councillors and MPs.

**How to write a letter to the editor**

Local newspapers often have letters pages where readers can send in their views for publication. These are often read by MPs as a way of gauging the mood of their constituents, which makes it a powerful platform for campaigning.

Getting something published in a letters page is straightforward – but you need a good ‘hook’ (a reason for them to publish your letter).

Ideas for hooks:

- Meeting your MP and feeling pleased with their commitment to the issue
- Responding to a relevant article you’ve seen about housing in the newspaper, using it as an opportunity to link to our campaign. If you do this, reference the article you read.

**How to submit your letter**

You can probably find the contact details for the letters page by picking up a copy of the paper itself (it will tell you where to submit letters), or by visiting the newspaper’s website.

**Writing the letter**

Letters don’t need to be long – 150–200 words is a great length. Stay clear and concise.

Plan your letter in three bullet points to get your key messages across. This is a useful structure:

1. What I think.
2. Why I think it.
3. What should happen next.

If you’re responding to an article, reference the title and date. Share your thoughts about the article (was it good, excellent, unfair etc), why you thought that, and what should happen next. Sign the letter with your name and your town, city or area. Local newspapers may not print it otherwise.

There are some letter to the editor examples in the appendix of this toolkit.

**Other ways you can get involved!**

Over the next few months, we’ll have lots of new ways for you to get more involved on a local level. We’d love to have you on board!

Below are a few ways you can make our campaign even more successful right now – and a few things other supporters have already done.

Being a Shelter supporter includes:

- Writing to, calling and meeting MPs
- Engaging your local community in our campaigns
- Spreading our messages online
- Participating in stunts and petition deliveries.

**Volunteering on our street stalls**

Hosting a table at a local event or in your town’s high street is a great way to spread our campaign messages. It also helps you get new people involved.
Meet others who are passionate about the same things you are, talk to them about campaigns and gather their support.

We often need volunteers to help us out with these – either by coming with us, or setting one up yourself.

If this is something that interests you, please contact us at campaign@shelter.org.uk.

Leading or joining a local team

If you want to help set up or join a local team of like-minded Shelter supporters in your area, let us know at campaign@shelter.org.uk.

As a local team lead or team member, you’ll help shape and lead your own campaigns. Our campaigns team at Shelter HQ will support you. Local team members have exclusive opportunities for training, to meet and work with Shelter staff, take part in events, national petition deliveries and lots more!

Why get more involved?

- **We’re a community**: with thousands of passionate supporters, we can take immediate action towards solving urgent housing problems.
- **What we do works**: We’ve changed the law before – with your help we can do it again.

**We’re housing experts**: millions of people each year come to us for advice and support. We know what the housing problems are and how to fix them.

**Natalie from London joined Shelter’s petition delivery at No.10...**

> ‘Thank you so much for letting me get involved [with the petition delivery]. It was an experience I’ll never forget. If there is anything that I can help with in the future count me in. You made me feel so welcome.’
> 
> Natalie

You can make a difference

This video shows how our supporters changed the law to make revenge evictions illegal.

Our advisers heard from lots of people who were evicted just for complaining to their landlord about repairs. Our supporters contacted us with photos of terrible renting conditions – including mould, damp and faulty electrics.

We campaigned for a new law to protect renters by making revenge evictions illegal. While the bill was heard in Parliament, thousands of our supporters urged their MP (by letter, telephone and Twitter) to turn up and vote the legislation through.

Eventually, the government listened to us all. Revenge evictions are now a thing of the past.

Thank you

Thank you so much for looking through this toolkit. We really hope you’ll feel even more well equipped than before to pick up a pen or meet your MP.

Contact us – we’re here to help

If you have any questions or need support with your campaigning, our campaigns team is only an email away.

For example, if you set up a meeting with your MP and want to talk about how the meeting is likely to go, get in touch. We can always run it through on the phone with you beforehand.

We’d love to hear how you get on! Please let us know when you’ve written your letter, recruited a friend to do the same, or set up a meeting with your MP.

Contact Claire and Janey at campaign@shelter.org.uk – we’ll be in touch!
APPENDIX 1: TEMPLATE LETTER TO GEORGE OSBORNE

Dear George Osborne,

Will you use the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) 2015 to fix our housing crisis?

When it comes on 25 November, please commit to providing affordable homes for ordinary people by:

■ Investing in building 125,000 affordable homes a year that ordinary people can buy and rent
■ Replacing all social homes that are sold off.

The power to fix the housing crisis is in your hands – and the only way to do it is to build more affordable homes.

<tell your personal story>

If we don’t build more affordable homes and don’t replace the social homes sold off through Right to Buy, housing waiting lists will get longer. Many people will be stuck paying high rents for homes in poor condition and more people will face homelessness.

I’m a supporter of Shelter, the housing and homelessness charity. It hears from millions of people facing bad housing and homelessness each year. Building more affordable homes would give them the security of a stable place to call home.

Everyone deserves a safe, secure and affordable place to call home. If you don’t act now, things will only get worse for the next generation.

Thanks very much – I’m depending on you.

Yours sincerely,

(Your name & full address)
Dear (MP name),

As a constituent and a Shelter supporter, I’m writing to ask you commit to fixing the housing crisis.

Ahead of the Comprehensive Spending Review on 25 November, would you write to the Chancellor to ask for a commitment to protecting affordable homes?

This would require:

- Investing in building 125,000 affordable homes a year that ordinary people can buy and rent
- Replacing all social homes that are sold off.

The only way to fix our housing crisis is to build more affordable homes – particularly social homes.

<tell your personal story>

If we don’t build more affordable homes and don’t replace the social homes sold off through Right to Buy, housing waiting lists will get longer. Many people will be stuck paying high rent costs for homes in poor condition and more people will face homelessness.

Everyone deserves a safe, secure and affordable place to call home. If the Chancellor doesn’t act now, the housing crisis in our area will get worse.

Will you please write to the Chancellor to forward my concerns?

Thanks very much, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

(Your name & full address)
APPENDIX 3: TEMPLATE MEETING REQUEST WITH MP

Subject line: Constituent requesting a meeting

Dear (MP’s name),

I am writing as your constituent, and a Shelter supporter, to request a short meeting with you on (suggested date). I will happily work around your availability if another date would be more convenient.

I would like to share with you some of the issues that matter the most to me ahead of the Comprehensive Spending Review— a key opportunity for the government to tackle the shortage of affordable homes in our community.

I look forward to hearing from you,

(Your name and full address)

APPENDIX 4: TEMPLATE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

In response to an article

The only reason we’re facing a housing crisis is because the government isn’t building enough affordable homes. I live in Haslemere, where there are next to no affordable homes to buy.

I’m 40 and have been renting my whole life. Unless the government does something soon, my partner and I will be renting into our retirement.

It’s shocking that politicians have proposed that housing developments of fewer than ten units would no longer have to include affordable homes (Affordable housing community threat, 22nd September 2014). This surely makes no sense, especially in areas like this – where developments are likely to be smaller.

Jeremy Hunt, our MP, should urge George Osborne to commit to investing in building more affordable homes that ordinary people can afford. It’s the only way we can fix the housing crisis.

Many thanks,

Emily Thorne

Haslemere
APPENDIX 5: AFTER AN MP MEETING

I'm concerned about the dire shortage of affordable homes in the UK – particularly the lack of social housing.

There are thousands of homeless families in Tottenham, but still we're not building enough affordable homes to rent or buy – least of all social homes. To fix our local housing shortage, we need the government to invest in providing enough housing for local people.

I recently met with our MP, David Lammy, and asked him to urge the Chancellor George Osborne to commit to investing in building more social housing. He agreed to follow my concerns up with the Chancellor ahead of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) on 25 November.

The CSR will be the government’s true test on housing. I hope it invests in the affordable homes – including social homes – our country desperately needs.

Best wishes,
Sabba Haywill
Tottenham

APPENDIX 6: SCRIPT FOR CALLING YOUR MP

Calling your MP:

Good morning/afternoon,

My name is [name] and I’m calling from [town name] on behalf of Shelter’s campaign to protect affordable homes.

I live in [local area name] and I’m worried about the lack of affordable homes in the UK. I would like you to please ask George Osborne whether he will fix our housing crisis in the spending review this November.

To fix the housing crisis he needs to:
1. Invest in affordable homes for ordinary people
2. Replace any social homes that are sold.

Thank you!
AFFORDABLE HOMES FOR ORDINARY PEOPLE

Right now, the majority of homes are only affordable for high earners. This means families across the country are struggling to find and keep a home.

Paula

Paula lives in a rented flat with her husband and three children.

‘My husband earns £22,000 and it doesn’t go far. Our rent is £675 a month and after food and bills we are usually struggling.

We have no savings and we have no money to pay moving costs. We can’t get a council house either because we’re not considered high priority – there are so many people on the waiting list.’

George Osborne has the opportunity to change this in the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) on 25 November. Shelter urges him to:

- Invest in building affordable homes for people to rent or buy
- Replace any social homes that are sold

Build genuinely affordable homes

Based on the best available evidence, Shelter estimates that at least 125,000 genuinely affordable homes per year are needed, of which:

- 75,000 should be at a low rent, at the level of Social Rent or ‘Capped Rent’
- 50,000 should be intermediate tenures, such as Shared Ownership.

The Affordable Homes Programme is one of the main tools the government has to make sure we build enough affordable homes.

If we don’t build affordable homes, we may end up building expensive homes. If this happens, by the end of this Parliament, a generation of ordinary working people will be trapped in expensive private renting or their childhood bedrooms.

The CSR is George Osborne’s last chance to change course.

Shelter wants him to use it to commit to building genuinely affordable homes that offer people on modest incomes the opportunity of a place they can call home.

Replace social homes that are sold off

For every nine homes sold off, only one is built in their place (since 2013). At this rate, the housing shortage will get worse, not better.

Right to Buy

Average since 1:1 replacement proposed 9:1

Sold Replaced

The Right to Buy plans only work if the homes sold are replaced. Otherwise, they just make our housing crisis worse.¹ The result is thousands of families remaining homeless – or trapped somewhere too insecure or too awful to truly call home.

What you can do

As my MP, I would appreciate your help in writing to George Osborne – urge him to invest in building affordable housing for people to rent or buy.

1. Shelter, In the Mix, 2014