

Shelter recommendations



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Ensuring more people have a home that meets the Living Home Standard

Increasing the number of homes that meet the Standard will need a collective effort. But it is possible. Together we can rise to the challenge of bringing a home for everyone back in reach, creating meaningful change for future generations. We're calling on the government to work in partnership with the public, private and non-profit sectors and increase the number of homes that meet the Standard. We believe that a country as great as ours can and should see everyone living in a place they can truly call home.

Currently, 43% of homes don't meet the Living Home Standard. We are calling on the government to work with us to increase the number of homes that meet the Standard in the future.

We can do this by:

- **Improving affordability:** build 250,000 new homes a year of which half are affordable homes. You can see more on how this can be done at www.thehomesweneed.org.uk
- **Increasing stability:** introduce the Stable Rental Contract - 5 year tenancies with predictable rents but also flexibility for tenant and landlord – as the norm for all private rented sector homes. You can see more on this in our report on stable renting, **A Better Deal**.
- **Creating more space:** introduce minimum space standards for all new developments. You can read more about this in our **Little Boxes, Fewer Homes** briefing.
- **Tackling poor conditions:** Ensure local authorities have the resources to properly enforce the fantastic new range of powers the government has passed to stamp out rogue landlords and improve conditions in the private rented sector. You can see more on what needs to be done in our **Safe and Decent Homes** report.
- **Improving neighbourhoods:** encourage alternative forms of housing development which give communities more control over the quality and kinds of housing in their area. You can see how we put this into practice for our award winning model for **delivering a new Garden City**.

These recommendations apply only to England. We work closely with Shelter Scotland and Shelter Cymru and together we will be aiming to ensure the Living Home Standard has an impact throughout Britain. Please see the Shelter Scotland and Shelter Cymru websites for details of how they are working to improve housing standards in Scotland and Wales.

To ensure more people reach the Living Home Standard, Shelter recommends:

1 Affordability

- Improving affordability is key to unlocking progress across all aspects of the Living Home Standard. As long as housing costs are high people will be forced to compromise on other aspects in order to find a home they can afford.
- To improve affordability we can increase incomes or reduce housing costs.
- In the long-term, we need to reduce the cost of housing. Building 250,000 homes a year will meet demand and help to stabilise prices so the gap between housing costs and incomes can begin to reduce.
- Half of new homes should be genuinely affordable to reflect the needs of lower and average income households. With a broad range of households struggling with affordability, the government and developers should explore an equally broad range of products, including shared ownership and low rent homes.
- In the short-term, the Government must ensure that housing benefit reflects actual housing costs, or tenants will be forced to make up unaffordable shortfalls. Local Housing Allowance rates should be reviewed to reflect recent rent rises and the so-called Bedroom Tax should be scrapped.

2 Decent conditions

- Conditions can be improved with sufficient will. The highest proportion of problems are in the private rented sector and this is where we would prioritise efforts. The Government has recently introduced new powers to tackle rogue landlords through the Housing and Planning Act. We hope that the Government continues along this route and maintains momentum on driving up standards in the sector.
- It's important that local authorities have the resource to use the full weight of their powers to target rogue landlords and work with amateur landlords to raise standards. Fining the worst landlords will provide revenue to carry out this work.
- Making it easier for people to find a decent home and tackling affordability problems will improve consumer power and ensure that renters are not stuck in poor quality accommodation due to a lack of alternatives. Increased stability will further empower renters to ask for improvements and increase their own commitment to and pride in their homes.
- Poor conditions for homeowners are often a reflection of broader affordability problems. Reducing housing costs will ensure that homeowners can afford to maintain their homes. Equity release schemes should also be explored for older homeowners to release funds for repairs and improvements.

3 Space

- Ultimately we will not address overcrowding without building family sized homes at prices people can afford.
- Shelter supports the introduction of an improved set of building regulations, to apply to all types of housing, which would set out required space standards and also ensure new homes were built with adequate storage.
- Our current planning system encourages developers to compromise on space and quality to reduce costs, so they can pay more in the competitive market for land. We could go some way towards rectifying this by providing sites for housebuilding at steady, lower prices through 'proactive planning' of the sort used in the Netherlands and Germany. Small and medium sized builders should be able to get hold of land at prices which allow them to compete on the quality and affordability of homes to the people buying or renting them.
- Overcrowding is worst in the social and private rented sectors. Adequate levels of housing benefit would ensure that renting families can afford to rent a home to meet their needs. Local authorities should ensure that overcrowded families are prioritised for the right-sized home in their allocations schemes and work with under-occupying households to facilitate downsizing.

4 Stability

- Stability is becoming increasingly hard for both social and private renters to enjoy, due to our legal frameworks.
- Private renters must be able to access Stable Rental Contracts, giving them security of tenure for five years and protection against unaffordable rent increases. This would dramatically improve stability in the private rented sector and recognise the needs of the growing number of renting families.
- Forthcoming changes to social tenancies risk reducing the number of social tenants who meet the Living Home Standard. There is still the opportunity to review how these are implemented to ensure that stability is not undermined.
- Homeowners need confidence in their ability to pay their mortgage to promote stability. Sensible regulation to ensure buyers can afford their commitments will help avoid precarious homeownership. Welfare safety nets must continue to be available to support homeowners during periods of economic uncertainty.

5 Neighbourhood

- Improving affordability will ensure that all households feel able to exercise genuine choice over where they live and do not feel forced into unsafe areas.
- Increasing stability for both private and social renters will ensure that people feel invested in their local community, including maintaining outside space and engaging with residents' groups. This will reduce the sense of churn.
- Good housing design includes thinking about the broader neighbourhood. We should encourage alternative forms of housing development – such as garden cities – where the developer, investor and landowner all care about the long term success of the new place. If those building the new community are invested long term, they will design more attractive homes within liveable neighbourhoods.
- Planning for homes should be linked more closely with planning for transport and amenities. In particular, we should look at the models of planning used in other European countries which successfully build new communities along improved transport links while putting in adequate public facilities such as schools and GP surgeries.

This is Shelter's recommended priority to-do list, but it is not an exhaustive summary of the options for helping more people to live in a home that meets the Standard. We welcome other thoughts and ideas and we hope that the Living Home Standard can contribute to wider thinking on how we create better housing for future generations. We are also very keen to collaborate with others to scope projects that kick-start its direct application to homes and hope this will also inspire independent initiatives.

We know that together we can create meaningful change for future generations. We're calling on the government to work in partnership with the public, private and non-profit sectors and increase the number of homes that meet the Standard. We believe that a country as great as ours can and should see everyone living in a place they can truly call home.

To learn more about our policy work and join the debate visit Shelter's policy blog - blog.shelter.org.uk

