

POLICY ESSENTIALS: HOUSING





ABOUT

The County Councils Network (CCN) represents 39 county and unitary councils across England. We are a councillor-led, cross-party organisation that works on behalf of our member councils and their communities to ensure they have a strong voice with national government, and to help deliver positive change for those authorities and the residents they serve.

The CCN aims to articulate the challenges and opportunities of its member councils, alongside their priorities, to the government and other key organisations. This is primarily done through original and impactful research across areas such as adult social care, children's services, housing and planning, and local government finance.


Building on our **Guide to CCN**, our updated series of **Policy Essentials** aims to give county and unitary councillors a short and concise overview of the most important policy issues facing their councils. This includes an overview of the key service responsibilities of councils; why it is a national advocacy priority for CCN; key developments in the national policy landscape; and CCN's key policy positions and advocacy priorities.

This Policy Essentials is focused on **Housing**. For more information on our policy work in this area, contact:



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What role do councils play in housing?

As housing authorities, CCN's unitary authority members play a central role in ensuring that their communities have access to safe and affordable housing. The legislative framework for housing is complex and there are a number of legal duties placed on authorities – these include:

- Homelessness duties: established by the Housing Act 1996, and amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017:
 - Duty to assess all eligible applicants who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and create a personal housing plan.
 - Prevention duty to help anyone at risk of homelessness within 56 days to prevent them from becoming homeless.
 - Relief duty to people already homeless that requires the council to help secure accommodation for at least 6 months.
 - Main housing duty – this applies if homelessness is not resolved through prevention or relief, and the applicant is eligible, homeless, in priority need, and not intentionally homeless. In these cases, the council must secure suitable accommodation.
 - Interim accommodation duty to provide temporary accommodation while other duties are processed to see if the applicant is eligible for support.
 - Certain public bodies also have a duty to refer people at risk of homelessness to a local authority.
- Housing standards and conditions: under the Housing Act 2004 and other legislation, authorities have a legal duty to maintain housing standards, including:
 - Taking enforcement action if serious hazards are identified in rented homes.
 - Licensing of homes in multiple occupation.



- Enforcement powers against private landlords where their homes fail to meet housing standards.
- Enforcing Private Rented Sector (PRS) legislation: under the Renters Rights Act 2025, with provisions starting in May 2026, authorities have a mandatory duty to enforce private rented sector legislation. Key duties and powers include:
 - Actively enforcing landlord legislation including the new periodic tenancy structure (which replace the now-abolished fixed-term assured shorthold tenancies with rolling 'assured periodic tenancies' which have no end date, two-month tenant notices and removal of 'no-fault' evictions), rent increase restrictions, anti-discrimination laws and the prohibition of rental bidding.
 - Out of area action – the new legislation expressly permits authorities to take enforcement action for breaches occurring outside their immediate area, acknowledging that rogue landlords often operate across boundaries.
 - Investigatory and entry powers – Issuing notices requiring landlords, agents, or any relevant person to provide information or documentation, and ability to enter business premises (e.g., letting agencies) without a warrant at any reasonable time for non-routine inspections if they suspect a breach.



- Financial penalty and prosecution duties – issuing civil penalties for serious or repeated breaches, enforcing against landlords who fail to join the PRS Landlord Ombudsman or fail to register on the PRS Database, penalising landlords who wrongfully use "no-fault" grounds (e.g., falsely claiming to sell or move in) to evict tenants, and fining landlords who refuse to let to tenants with children or on benefits.
- Regulatory and monitoring duties – reporting to the Secretary of State on enforcement activity and enforcing new regulations regarding property conditions, including damp and mould, as part of the Decent Homes Standard application to the PRS.
- Strategic housing duties:
 - Local housing strategy, required under the Local Government Act 2000.
 - Housing and homelessness needs and strategies.
 - Allocation of social housing.

Unitary authorities are also responsible for the planning of housing too, and this is covered within a separate Planning Essentials document covering Planning & Infrastructure.

While this Policy Essentials covers the main duties of housing authorities, county councils do not have statutory duties in housing but are increasingly working across their areas to help relieve housing pressures. This includes providing financial support to housing authorities (district councils within two tier areas) to help prevent homelessness, joint ventures with developers on council owned land, and setting up their own housing companies to deliver housing.



What are the key issues facing CCN members in housing?

- County areas house over half the country's population, with their areas spread across 86% of England's landmass, **however it has become widely acknowledged that the country remains in the grips of an acute housing crisis**. Increasingly unaffordability, because of a lack of housing supply, has meant that people can no longer afford to buy their own home. This has led to a dramatic change in housing tenure, and county areas are no exception.
- Pressure for new housing in county areas is increasing as a significant number of households are choosing to live in county areas. **The latest census data shows that by 2021 there were 807,193 more households residing in county areas compared to a decade ago.**
- However, housing delivery in CCN areas has been higher than other council types, with just under 130,000 additional homes being delivered in 2022/23. **Between 2013 and 2023, some 1.1 million homes were delivered in county areas, accounting for 51% of all housing in England.** The level of affordable housing delivered has also increased in county areas with 151,812 affordable homes delivered between 2018/19 – 2022/23.
- Despite this delivery, housing in counties remains some of the most unaffordable in England outside of London, **with the average house price now £309,000 – over 11 times average annual earnings**. As a result, between 2011 and 2021, the number of private renters in county areas grew by over 500,000 (19%), while the number accessing homeownership fell by 200,000.
- The increase in private renting is causing instability and uncertainty for residents, with short contracts and landlords able to evict tenants with little justification, **while a shortage of social and affordable housing has led to a rapid rise in homelessness and use of temporary accommodation.**



- **Homelessness levels increased above pre-pandemic levels with 18% more households assessed as homeless in county areas when comparing data from Quarter 4 of 2020/21 to Quarter 4 of 2022/23.** With a lack of social housing, this means that temporary accommodation use is also up – rising from 6,087 households in 2018/19 to 17,792 in 2022/23 – this is an increase of 52% over the last five years. This is causing significant financial pressure for councils with housing responsibilities.
- Pressure for social housing is also increasing, **with an additional 40,000 people on housing waiting lists in counties rising from 384,377 to 424,400 between 2018/19 and 2022/23.**
- **The challenges of housing an increasingly ageing population, alongside improving housing standards and climate considerations, are also playing out in county areas.** Older people are often staying in unsuitable housing and more needs to be done to meet the demand of the growing market for specialist accommodation.



What is the national policy context for housing?

- Tackling the housing crisis has become a central priority for all political parties over recent years. There have been a range of interventions aimed at increasing housing delivery through planning reforms, as well as demand-led initiatives aimed at making housing more affordable to first time buyers. This includes schemes such as Help to Buy and First Homes.
- Social housing is delivered through the government-funded Affordable Homes Programme (AHP) alongside Section 106 as part of the planning system. The current AHP runs from 2021–2026 and has a budget of £11.5 billion, and the Chancellor announced an additional £39 billion at the recent Spending Review for a new 10-year programme to deliver affordable homes.
- Much like the delivery of general needs housing, it is widely acknowledged that we are also not delivering enough social or affordable housing. The National Housing Federation estimates that we need to build 90,000 social rented homes each year to keep up with demand. We therefore need to see much more investment if this figure is going to be delivered.
- The Right to Buy has also eroded social housing stock, and as of March 2023 it was estimated that over 2 million homes had been sold through the policy, with the replacement of these homes not keeping up with sales.
- In order to combat this, the Labour government has taken measures to significantly restrict the Right to Buy to protect social housing stock. This includes increasing the minimum tenancy required to 10 years, and reducing maximum discounts and increasing repayment costs if the tenant sells their property within ten years of buying it. In addition, new social housing is exempt from the Right to Buy for 35 years, and authorities will now be able to retain 100% of the receipt of the sale and combine it with government grant to replace lost stock.



- In an attempt to improve the experience and security of those living in the Private Rented Sector (PRS), the Renters Rights Act received Royal Assent in October 2025. The legislation aims to strengthen tenant protections, such as abolishing “no-fault” evictions, introducing a Decent Homes Standard for private rentals, and expands enforcement against rogue landlords. As a result of the Act, local authorities are likely to face greater pressure to investigate complaints, enforce housing standards, and manage a potential rise in homelessness presentations if landlords exit the market. While the reforms empower councils with stronger legal tools and access to landlord databases, they also imply higher administrative burdens and resource demands.
- Finally, in December 2025, the Government published its National Plan to End Homelessness. This sets out a long-term strategy for England aimed at making homelessness “rare, brief and non-recurring,” backed by around £3.5 billion over three years. The plan combines immediate action, medium-term reform and long-term system change, with a strong emphasis on prevention, increasing housing supply, and improving support services.



What are CCN's key policy positions and advocacy priorities?

CCN's Business Plan 2026/27 sets out the networks priorities for housing and homelessness over the coming year. The plan sets out that CCN will enhance its support across housing and homelessness services, highlighting the increasing costs of temporary accommodation and influencing the Government's homelessness strategy. In particular we will:

- **Elevate the scale and impact of the housing crisis in county and rural areas** highlighting rising pressures such as temporary accommodation and affordability, and ensuring government policy reflects the specific challenges of rural and non-metropolitan housing markets.
- **Update our Housing in Counties publication**, updating research on **delivery trends, demographics, and tenure**, and using this to inform the networks advocacy and influence national policy and funding decisions.
- **Strengthen the role of counties in tackling homelessness** by commissioning work to influence and support implementation of the National Plan to End Homelessness, **prioritising prevention, sustainable housing-led solutions and fair funding allocations for councils**.
- **Promote best practice and innovation**, sharing examples of how county and unitary councils are **delivering homes, reducing homelessness, and improving housing outcomes**, and strengthen partnerships with key housing organisations.
- **Support councils through local government reorganisation (LGR)**, including advising on the **integration of planning and housing services** in new unitary structures and sharing best practice on service delivery models.

[Read more about our advocacy and research in the CCN Business Plan & Work Programme 2026/27.](#)





Reports

- [County Councils Network - County Spotlight - Housing and Planning \(2025\)](#)
- [County Councils Network - Housing in Counties \(2024\)](#)
- [County Councils Network and Association of Retirement Community Operators - Planning for Retirement: How retirement communities can help meet the needs of our ageing population \(2020\)](#)

Press Releases



- [4 September 2025 - Report spotlights how counties are building homes of all tenures and raising the bar on standards](#)
- [23 March 2024 - Number of renters in rural areas increased faster than London over the last decade, as new report calls for a long-term plan for housing](#)