



## **Online Roundtable with Eddie Hughes MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Housing and Rough Sleeping.**

Wednesday, 15th September 2021 at 2.40pm - 4.00pm

### **Members**

Ben Everitt MP (BE) (Chair)

### **Guests**

Eddie Hughes MP (EH)

Aster

Barratt Developments plc

Berkeley Group

Edaroth

Get Living

Karbon Homes

Land Promoters & Developers Federation

Midland Heart

Sanctuary Group

JLL

Places for People

RPS Group

Regulator of Social Housing (RSH)

### **1. Introduction**

- EH thanked the Chair for the invitation to attend the online roundtable. He began by noting that the timing of the roundtable was unusual. He listed the issues the social housing industry faces including their sustainability, quality, and endurance. EH affirmed that the Government's approach moving forward is to ensure that these are consistently met in regards to new housing and that landlords can't exploit tenants through failure to deliver.
- EH reassured that social housing landlords do deliver excellent services to their residents, but referenced a recent ITV documentary which he used as evidence that this is not always the case.
- EH mentions the Social Housing White Paper. He stated that it will show how the Government intends on rebalancing the relationship between tenant and landlord, whilst improving how complaints are recorded and handled, and improving proactive consumer regulation. The White Paper will address important issues such as the improvement of fire safety and carbon monoxide safeguards, but EH stressed that these will be published in the near future.
- The White Paper shall also strengthen existing housing ombudsmen and will do the same for a new Housing Complaints Code, the plans of which will be published online in the future.



- EH acknowledged that not every resident will understand how they can use these services, so publicised the Government's 'Make Things Right' campaign to boost their awareness of them. EH then stated that underpinning this campaign is a new consumer regulatory regime, which he advised will be introduced into legislation soon.
- EH finalised by talking about the Government's rough sleeping strategy. He praised the excellent progress so far and highlights that the number of people sleeping rough has fallen for the third year in a row. He also highlighted the Government's £750m commitment to end rough sleeping but stressed the need for more to be done. EH reaffirmed his and the Government's commitment to tackle the remaining complex issues suffered by rough sleepers including any health problems (mental, physical or otherwise) or criminal justice issues. EH said that we ought to look at the system holistically in order to provide effective support, hence why the Department is considering the role of health, justice, and employment alongside housing considerations.

## 2. Questions

*The delivery of new social and affordable homes for rent remains fairly low in the face of a growing need. How does the Government plan to close the housing gap for this tenure?*

- EH stated that the number one answer to the question is the Affordable Homes Programme, a £12bn investment in social and specialist housing. EH said that it is important to remember that whilst we need affordable housing, this needs to be at all tenures. He mentioned that his party, the Conservative Party was the party of homeownership, and as a Conservative, he believed everybody should have the opportunity to own their own home and pass it on to their family after death.
- EH praised the Government's efforts in making funding available but stressed that all constituent elements must work together, including planning reform. EH regarded larger contractors and developers as having disproportionate access to contracts, thereby preventing small and medium-sized contractors from accessing the market.

*MMC has the potential to reduce the cost of new housing when delivered at scale. To achieve the required scale, it will require surety from the housing market and public sector to drive up the necessary investment in factories and employees from MMC companies. What more can the Government do to further drive adoption and confidence in MMC as a solution to help close the gap in housing supply?*

- EH assured that the Department could help by doing what it has already done for the houses recently built. 25% of the products they use will need to be through MMC. MMC provides us with an opportunity to have a workforce in one location under good conditions. EH praised MMC for its simplicity and streamlined nature in that it is better to build component parts on one site as this way the quality, environment, labour flow, and carbon emissions can be controlled more effectively. EH stated that MMC is a significant part of our housing future.



*The Charter for Social Housing Residents is to be welcomed. The Charter seeks to ensure tenants have access to decent home standards and particularly access to good quality open green spaces. Is there merit for MHCLG to amend planning guidance to ensure all residents have access to open spaces including green rooftop platforms to meet the objectives set out in the Charter?*

- EH noted that the Planning Policy Framework addresses this, so there is only so much the Government should be doing. He stressed that the Social Housing White Paper is and should focus on the relation between landlord and tenant (and local authorities) as it is in the best interest of each to build properties sympathetic to the needs of the residents.
- EH highlighted that one benefit of the Coronavirus pandemic was that people, after having spent months indoors, now appreciate green spaces to a greater extent. EH stated that the Government, therefore, does not need to do too much as it will now be more incumbent on social housing landlords to ensure properties are built with the residents in mind.

*We were pleased to see the additional funding released for community housing, but these are quite short-term commitments. Can you give any insight into whether there will be any longer-term funding for this kind of housing which we see work so well in practice through our community land trust projects (CLT)?*

- EH professed not to know the answer due to the deadline having been so recent (13th September). Preparations have been hectic and all Department proposals will be submitted to HM Treasury. EH said he looked forward to the Chancellor's decision.

*The Housing First initiative has worked effectively. Can you give any insight as to whether there will be continued funding and expansion for this scheme moving forward?*

- EH responded by saying that it would partly. He praised Mayor Andy Street of the West Midlands in his decision to convene a group to tackle homelessness in the region and highlighted that Housing First was key in achieving this.
- EH referred to his own background working for the YMCA and helping young homeless people. EH specifically mentioned that the conversations he has had with metro mayors in Liverpool and Manchester were great opportunities. EH did however mention that the initiative was intended to be part of three pilot trials, one of which had a problematic start, and the other two were affected by Covid-19. EH finished by affirming that he was an optimist.

*How is the Government going to help local authorities build capability and capacity to accelerate the delivery of new truly affordable homes? And how will it hold them to account on reducing their waiting lists?*

- EH responded by saying it was more complex than that. Those who work in development have necessary skillsets which are finite. EH warned that those with these skillsets can be poached by other, larger construction companies. EH stated that it was incumbent on all in the construction industry to ensure that skills are spread evenly and is available to councils and housing associations. Through a combination of local government, Homes England, and

the LGA, the Department is working towards such a goal. EH stressed that there is more to be done, but that he was confident that it could be achieved.

*You will be aware of the August CPI figure and of the nervous arrival of the September figure. What is your sense of this?*

- EH stated how he felt unqualified to speak on the issue he professed to have no responsibility for, but expressed understanding with trepidation.
- EH agree that on one hand, everybody wants more money to spend, but on the other hand, the Government and the Department must think about those needing to pay their rent. The agreement has only been in place with the Housing Association since April 2021, so the idea of changing it to avoid seeing a figure we find problematic seems too sudden given they have just been afforded funding certainty.

*Skills have long been in decline, so what is your view on the Government's strategy in ensuring there are skills to implement their net-zero agenda?*

- EH expressed confidence in his perception that the constituent parts of this are coming together. He has seen more of a drive towards vocational training and T-Levels. He highlighted the latter as an alternate route without requiring a university degree.
- EH stated that investment needs to begin in the UK as continental labour will possibly be more difficult to obtain when it comes to building 300,000 new houses. With regards to distribution, EH expressed interest in the number of individuals moving out of London.
- Due to Covid-19, office spaces are less essential, and it must be the Government's duty to ensure that when opportunities are created they are spread across the country. EH highlighted a new Siemens factory in Goole to show that the UK is in a good position to lead the way on even, equal change.
- EH expressed optimism that the UK is at the forefront of green economic technology, and stressed the need to distribute the correct people with the correct skillset across the country evenly to spread prosperity, but also to remove the dependency on London.

*Is there any other way to drive investment in MMC (such as gigafactories and regional investment)?*

- EH suggested that there are large companies with significant funds who will see MMC as a new opportunity and will be prepared to invest. Once we have someone who gets investing right (in terms of varying designs and standards), then there will be a blueprint from which further investment will dramatically increase.
- The interest of some, including Legal & General, will ensure that it happens because they see it as the future of standardised high-quality housing. EH stated that he will be responsible for a new homes ombudsman, which he expressed optimism in.

The Chair thanked EH for his attendance, whilst EH said that he hoped the APPG would invite him back again.

**Meeting ends.**