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Written by Kerri Blyberg, Monitoring Consultant on 10 October 2017



Social housing was very much at the forefront of the agenda as party members and lobbyists descended on Brighton and Manchester for conference season.

Starting things off, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn announced a full review of social housing policy as he took centre stage in Brighton, while also pledging action on regeneration schemes, with conference delegates voting unanimously in favour of tenant ballots on estate regeneration before projects get the go-ahead.

More controversially, Corbyn promised a future Labour government would introduce rent controls to protect tenants. Although vague on detail, stakeholders such as Polly Neate, CEO, Shelter, have warned that “old fashioned rent-setting” could hinder rather than help those on low incomes.

Indeed, unintended consequences of such mechanisms could see further reduced supply as landlords look to sell their stock rather than rent.

On the fringe front, the social and affordable housing theme remained, with three sessions honing in on Grenfell, decent homes and the future of social housing.

Unsurprisingly, Brexit was also a common vocal point across both Labour and Conservative conference fringe rooms, with panel members and delegates alike discussing how the construction skills gap could be impacted, and how each party could empower UK cities post-Brexit.

While other unfortunate events somewhat overshadowed the content of May's closing speech, the flagship announcement of a "new generation" of council housing and affordable homes for rent was widely welcomed by the social housing sector, with a bold pledge from May promising to dedicate her premiership to tackling the housing crisis.

Councils and housing associations were promised a £2bn funding boost for affordable housing, with a specific mention that these would include homes for social rent. While a welcome injection, many were underwhelmed that May's promise of a 'rebirth' in council housing amounted to no more than an enlarged funding pot, and not the lifting of the much-resented Housing Revenue Account (HRA) borrowing cap speculated prior.

More welcome news took the form of rent certainty for social landlords, with DCLG confirming that increases to social housing rents would be limited to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) plus one per cent for five years from 2020.

Aside from social housing, further government announcements centred around strengthening tenant rights and increasing home ownership, with Chancellor Philip Hammond announcing a £10bn cash injection in the Help to Buy Equity Loan.

While thought to allow an additional 135,000 first-time buyers get on the property ladder, some have argued that without a boost to home building, the revival could see demand further outstrip supply, with the Adam Smith Institute likening the move to "throwing petrol on to a bonfire".

Finally, standing by their commitment to protect private sector tenants, Communities Secretary Sajid Javid used his speech to announce new measures forcing all landlords to be covered by a compulsory redress scheme, empowering renters to challenge ill treatment and rip-off fees. Going forward, all letting agents will also be regulated to ensure they meet strict minimum standards, while the government will consult on a new 'Housing Court' to settle disputes.

Landlords were also promised incentives for providing 12 month tenancies however, much like details on how the £10bn Help to Buy boost would be funded, the particulars of this are expected to be announced in the Autumn Budget. With pressure also mounting on the Chancellor to announce stamp duty reforms in his speech, there's no doubt that those from across the housing sector will be eagerly awaiting 22 November for more on the housing front.

[Communities, housing and planning](#) [1]

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