

Dear Dominic Raab MP,

We write to you as the MP for Oxford East and the Leader of Oxford City Council to call on the Government to take urgent action to address the national housing crisis. This crisis is causing misery, hardship, and stress to thousands of people in Oxford and millions across the country.

Nationally, rough sleeping has increased by a shocking 169% since 2010, and we're sure you share our concern that a heart-breaking 120,540 children are now having to live in temporary accommodation, with no permanent home to call their own. In the last 8 years rents in the private sector have soared but renters' rights remain weak, often leaving them at the mercy of under-regulated landlords. And house prices in shortage areas like Oxford mean that homeownership or even renting locally is out of reach for increasing numbers of young adults.

It is a national crisis, but one that hits particularly hard in Oxford. We face the challenges of high demand from our dynamic and growing local economy and the supply of new homes being heavily constrained by the tight greenbelt around the city boundary. But the main challenge we face is due to the failure of Government policy to rise to the challenges of the crisis.

The period of Coalition and Conservative Governments since 2010 has seen the lowest level of house building since the 1920s. The Government has made it harder for councils to build council houses, which further pushes up private rents. And as part of the Government's austerity agenda, funding for local government has drastically fallen. In Oxfordshire, this has resulted in the Conservative-led County Council cutting all of its funding for homelessness services.

The housing crisis is the predictable result of these policy decisions. Recent speeches suggest a new direction in housing policy will be adopted to increase house building and the number of genuinely affordable homes, but there is no evidence on the ground that the crisis is easing.

In spite of the pressures imposed by the Government's austerity policies, Oxford City Council has done excellent work to tackle the local housing crisis. It has retained its roughly 8,000 council houses and invested in significant improvements to them and also to our five tower blocks so that they can continue to provide excellent homes for the next 50 years. There are ambitious plans to build more affordable housing on the limited amount of land that the Council owns. Through sound financial management the City Council has been able to maintain and increase its funding for homelessness services and has won additional grants to prevent homelessness. And it has introduced stricter rules for landlords, through a licensing scheme, improving standards for houses in multiple occupancy.

The City Council works closely with other housing partners like St Mungo's to provide a range of services for homeless people in the city from emergency shelter to support and outreach services to help people get back on their feet and into permanent homes. The City Council also has a number of innovative projects to prevent homelessness and sustain people in their own homes, in spite of difficulties with the unrealistic level of local housing allowance as part of the Government's welfare reforms.

The City Council can mitigate the effects of the crisis – but only the Government can solve it. Urgent and bold action is needed. On behalf of the many families and single people who are facing hardship because of the housing crisis we urge you to follow the advice from a wide range of housing and planning professionals, the Local Government Association and the Parliamentary Opposition, to set out to provide secure homes for everyone. We call on you to:

- Build at least 100,000 council and housing association homes per year, for genuinely affordable rent or sale.
- Protect renters' rights by making 3-year tenancies the norm, implementing an inflation cap on rent rises, and reverse the cruel decision to abolish housing benefit for 18 to 21-year olds.



- Safeguard homeless hostels and supported housing from cuts.
- Look again at the levels of Local Housing Allowance to enable people forced to rent in the private sector to be able to live near their families and workplaces.

Taking these actions would mark an important start to solving the housing crisis. For the sake of people across Oxford and the country, we implore you to do so.

Yours sincerely,

Anneliese Dodds MP

Cllr Susan Brown, Leader of Oxford City Council