



The Right Honourable Robert Jenrick MP
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government

By email to: robert.jenrick@communities.gov.uk

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21st May 2021

Dear Minister,

The affordability of rent is an ever growing issue across the country, but especially so for areas such as Margate, Ramsgate and Thanet as a whole. In Thanet 29% of all households are living on a low income, defined as less than £15,988 p.a. If you compare this to the cost of a 3 bedroom home let at the Local Housing Allowance, the cost represents over 60% of their income and is neither affordable nor sustainable.

Our district is in urgent need of a significant supply of affordable homes to rent. We need a properly funded programme of public sector building in line with the levelling up principles for those on low incomes who are unable to access a suitable home. That programme should not be reliant on the development of private market homes as a source of land and subsidy for affordable housing. Many housebuilders take a long term view about their own investment needs and we need funding for affordable homes now.

Across the country we are seeing a continual pattern of displacement and a disproportionate effect on affordability in areas of regeneration such as Margate. Regeneration is essential and brings many positives; but the purchase of second homes, airbnb's and investment properties can cause significant issues for those who are forced to rely on the private sector to provide their homes.

It is ever more difficult for District Councils to build independently and house everyone who is in need of the protections that a Council property provides; as of today, our waiting list stands at 1,476 and the impossibility of providing for that list without further funding means that reliance on the private sector to care for our residents is unavoidable.

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Many landlords provide exemplary care; but in these times, with the financial insecurity that cannot be avoided in terms of the pandemic, stability in terms of accommodation for those outside the Council system can be precarious. If landlords are struggling, then tenants will struggle; and if residents are struggling to afford rent, then the system as a whole not only fails to provide care and the necessities for life, but also is unsustainable in the long term.

Residents in Thanet need the protections that Council housing brings, and in these times we have a chance to look again at our systems and how effective they are in providing for those who are most vulnerable; and currently, some of our most vulnerable residents are those who are at the mercy of rent inflation due to demographic pressures.

What is affordable rent in London is not affordable rent here; and without central action to look at how we can provide an infrastructure to prevent or safeguard against these fluctuations, vulnerable residents are often faced with no choice but to move from their area, disrupting families and education in many cases, and disadvantaging those on lower incomes.

Our community is inclusive. We are very used to protecting each other, and will continue to do so. We know that community includes everyone, regardless of background or income; we will fight to maintain that community, and do everything possible, as we always do, to build an inclusive and positive society. But to do so effectively requires a coherent central approach not only to building but to regulating the fluctuations that produce this level of instability for residents who need the most protection.

Without this protection we will continue to see a rise in the need for temporary accommodation, and this combined with the pressures of the pandemic creates further difficulties. We have seen significant rises in both domestic violence and family exclusion cases, and that combined with rent inflation and the scarcity of even private rentals is creating a situation that requires acknowledgement and intervention; and I know this situation is not unique to our Council.

Our Council knows how to build well; we have already this year submitted a development for a design award. We build sustainably, we build sympathetically, and our rents are affordable and our understanding of our area second to none. But to provide fully for our population, we have to be funded to build; and this is not an issue unique to this Council.

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Councils need investment to provide services; housing is, in every sense, the foundation for community cohesion, and we have a duty to provide excellent housing, and protect those who are struggling. At the current levels of funding, it is extraordinarily difficult to do that; and so I write to ask what steps will be taken long term to provide funding and housing stability for my area, and all other areas affected by rent inflation, in order to build an infrastructure that can support all our residents.

I also ask what provision is being made to support Councils such as ours with increasing pressure on our temporary accommodation and homelessness service; we have an award winning homelessness service in our RISE team, but without guarantees in terms of multi-year long term funding, their excellent work is placed under unnecessary pressure.

It is our role as Councils to help provide the building blocks for residents to thrive; but to do so, we require the freedom to develop a localised approach combined with centralised support.

Yours Sincerely,

Councillor Helen Whitehead
Deputy Leader of Thanet District Council

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