



all party parliamentary group for healthy homes and buildings

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Non-Verbatim Minutes

'Laying the foundations for Healthy Homes'

Speaker: Kit Malthouse MP, Minister of State for Housing and Planning

17:00 – 18:00 Monday 13th May 2019

Committee Room 10, Palace of Westminster, House of Commons, SW1A 0AA

Welcome and Introduction

Jim Shannon MP, Chair of the Healthy Homes and Buildings APPG (HHB APPG), welcomed the Minister, Kit Malthouse, Parliamentary colleagues and stakeholders to the meeting to discuss the recommendations made in the White Paper, "Laying the foundations for healthy homes and buildings", which is a significant piece of work based on a weight of evidence received from over 60 organisations some of whom were present at the meeting. Jim said that the Minister will agree that the homes and buildings we work and live in should be healthy and positively contribute to our physical and mental health and not diminish it. The exact cost to the public purse, and the human cost, in terms of health, wellbeing, educational attainment and social care is unfathomable.

The White Paper makes it clear that healthy homes and buildings would contribute to:

- Lower costs to the NHS and a healthier population;
- Better educational attainment and workplace productivity
- Reduced emissions, lower energy bills and a lower carbon footprint
- Improved health, wellbeing and comfort
- Greater life chances, independent living and care

Jim said that the White Paper is testament to the need to build better quality and performing homes and buildings as well as upgrade existing housing stock, which comprises the vast majority of the homes people live in today. We are calling for Government to provide a public health focus that considers the indoor environment as much as the external environment, consistent with the fact that many people spend 90% of their time indoors.

There are three over-arching recommendations made in our White Paper which will provide the main focus for discussion today:

1. Governance

Government needs to establish a cross departmental committee for health and buildings to champion change; recognising the interaction between homes, buildings, health, education and the economy.

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In summary, an inter-departmental Government Committee including all Government Department and agencies responsible for health, housing and construction – to include DHSC, DfE, MHCLG, PHE – should be formed to ensure that health and wellbeing is placed at the heart of existing future housing provision.

2. New Build

Grow the research and evidence base, starting with a focus on housing and schools, to develop a clear case for further Government action on standards for new build.

In summary... We need to drive up quality, performance and standards of new build. We need to build homes and communities which maximise the occupant's health and wellbeing. Government must adopt a more holistic approach to include safety, space, energy efficiency, ventilation, heating, noise, air quality and lighting.

3. Retrofit

Make the renovation of current housing stock an infrastructure priority and develop plans for retrofitting that takes a holistic approach to maximising health and wellbeing.

In brief... Renovation of existing housing stock must become a Government priority. Government needs to develop plans to retrofit existing homes which maximise health and wellbeing and improve health performance.

Ultimately, the recommendations made in our White Paper provide the basis for a step-change in policy which will drive-up standards and help to reduce health problems caused or made worse by living and working in unhealthy homes.

Jim invited the Minister to respond to the White Paper recommendations and give his thoughts on how we can make progress.

Kit Malthouse MP, Minister of State for Housing, said that we intuitively know that the buildings we live in have a lot to do with our health and wellbeing. He congratulated Jim Shannon, the HHB APPG and all those involved in putting together the White Paper.

The Government's ambition to build 300,000 homes a year is a challenge, but building quantity and quality is the even bigger challenge. Government want to build not just homes but what's needed to make neighbourhoods work. The Minister referenced the Elephant & Castle area of London as an example of where the focus was on quantity, not quality, resulting in a loss of any sense of neighbourhood.

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The Minister's observations on the 3 over-arching recommendations made in the White Paper are summarised as follows:

Governance: Whilst it is tricky as Government departments all have their own priorities, the Minister hopes we can achieve cross-departmental working. There is a lot of interest across the departments to come together on the journey to deliver housing, not just from the Department for Health but also from the Ministry of Defence and Local Government. The response must be a whole country effort – Industry must design and create the solutions – it needs to be a cross Governmental departments and industry collaboration.

New Build: When looking at building new homes, the same errors have been made time and time again. We must grow the research and the evidence base to ensure that the houses we build will withstand the test of time and provide the healthy housing the country needs.

Retrofit: As technology changes so too will the way we build houses. There is a move towards Passivhaus becoming a standard in new build for example and technology can play a huge role in how we achieve an optimum standard for our homes. We must look at how that technology can be utilised to improve the existing stock.

The Minister said that the key to all these recommendations is Local Authorities. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) allows civic leaders to take the decisions on what types of neighbourhoods they want to produce – they have the planning powers. He also noted the current review of building regulations that is being carried out and the need for standards in social housing is being addressed by the Decent Homes Standard. He assured the Group that he is with them on the mission and will continue to pull together leaders to ensure this happens.

Questions to the Minister from the panel

1. Governance

Question: Will the Minister commit to creating an inter-departmental committee involving all relevant Government departments and agencies to ensure that health and wellbeing is a key policy consideration in housing and tell us who the Ministerial lead for healthy housing is or should be?

Response: It is above the Minister's paygrade to create an inter departmental committee, but he will try to coordinate this. He said that Healthy Homes and Buildings falls within his responsibilities as the Minister of State for Housing. There is a Housing Taskforce, chaired by

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the Prime Minister, Theresa May, but the Minister could suggest a Sub-committee be set up to push this agenda forward.

2. New Build

Question: *Will the Government develop a specific healthy homes policy to ensure that new homes are built to protect health and enhance wellbeing?*

Response: The Minister reasserts that it is in the hands of local authorities to decide what is appropriate. Government is averse to pushing regulation as it can impact on supply and there is always the question of 'who pays?' Is it the supplier or the consumer? House builders are not necessarily good with new technologies. There is an aspiration to have good quality and good design which is being addressed by the Better Building Commission and the New Homes Ombudsman will be put in place to stimulate that aspiration as well.

3. Retrofit

Question: *Will the Minister make it easier for the public to assess the health performance of homes, such as by introducing a new energy and health performance certificate or a building renovation passport on the sale of properties or the implementation of a compulsory HHSRS check at the end of any rental tenancy?*

Response: This is critical in the rented sector. There are too many people living in poor quality homes and a real change and reform is needed. There needs to be a focus on safety – landlord's duties around safety and health will play a big part. Standards can be too restrictive leaving people living in an airtight box which leads to more complaints about lack of ventilation. The willingness in the house builders to change is not there – they are still building the same houses as they have done for 30 years or more. There needs to be a push to adopt new technologies and innovation.

Questions and stakeholder discussion

Question: Mary Canavan, Habinteg

Has accessible housing for disabled people been taken into consideration in the White Paper recommendations and by the Department for Housing?

Minister's Response:

Local authorities have the power to ensure that their housing stock and new builds meet the needs of their residents. The Minister gave his apologies and left the meeting for the Adjournment of the House of Commons.

Question: Jill Mortimer, Age UK

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Why is adaptability and accessibility not more mainstream? Whilst the National Planning Framework gives power to Local Authorities, there is a huge scope for challenges, and they need more powers.

Response from the panel: Jade Lewis, Saint-Gobain

The White Paper does cover accessibility and adaptability and does agree that it needs to be on the agenda. Jade said that the White Paper supports a holistic approach to building design, putting the occupant's needs foremost, and the right evidence needed to be used to move things forward.

Question: Lynne Sullivan, Good Homes Alliance

While the Future Homes Standard was announced in the context of energy efficiency, is this not a key opportunity to set a standard for health and wellbeing, as the Department is already reviewing ventilation and energy efficiency? There needs to be better assessment of indoor air quality and health.

Response from the panel: We are tabling a Parliamentary Question on the Future Homes Standard and your comments will certainly feed into that.

Question: Robert Homes, Damp Detectives

Why are we not looking at the products in people's homes that are giving off high level VOCs into airtight buildings with little or no ventilation?

Response from the panel: Meghan Thompson, Airtopia

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs do have a clean air strategy that is looking at the labelling of products and how they can make recommendations without telling people what they should do in their own homes.

Response from the panel: Jade Lewis, Saint-Gobain

Again, there needs to be a holistic to approach to building design, taking into account air quality. The white paper asks for Government support to increase consumer awareness to tackle this challenge and make people more aware of how their home can affect their health.

Question: Nick Bungay, Habinteg

How can we ensure that accessible homes are provided to people with disabilities? The organisation would like to share report their report on the matter with the Minister and the Group, highlighting the disparity between the number of accessible homes in London in comparison to the rest of the country. The aging population is creating a crisis need for accessible and adaptable homes.

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Question: Richard Meredith, Health & Safety Executive, Northern Ireland
Commends the work of the APPG and the White Paper – but does it cover work places not just homes? Also comments on the need to consider mental health issues.

Response from the panel: Jade Lewis, Saint-Gobain

The work of the HHB APPG does not just cover homes but buildings as a whole, including work places. However, the responses to the consultation on our Green Paper were overwhelmingly covering housing. Hence the focus on housing as a starting point. The link between productivity and the built environment is significant and an increase in building performance would have real commercial and economic benefits in other sectors.

Question: Isabella Myers, UKIEG

Since the Minister is suggesting that a lot of the power lies with Local Authorities, could a Local Authority champion this and take it on as a challenge?

Response from the panel: Jade Lewis, Saint-Gobain

We could find out whether any Local Authorities are already tackling these issues. Exeter City Council is a great example, but their work is not heavily marketed, hence the information tends not to be fed to other Local Authorities. It all relies on a Local Authority's willingness to change and adapt.

Response from the panel: Keith Ritchie, Beama

What we want to see is consistency and an optimum level of standards being met by Local Authorities rather than a minimum.

Comment: Chris Watson, University of Birmingham, Academic Practitioner Partnership & Housing Research

The Minister noted that housing is the Government's no.1 priority but the comments made were mostly about New Build when we have a huge existing housing stock in very poor condition, not just in the Private Rented Sector. There is a huge problem of housing quality and the Minister's comments did not reflect that. The Government needs to undertake a comprehensive review of the current housing stock. It cannot just be left to the Local Authorities with their Planning Frameworks to address their housing stock. Birmingham is the largest City Council in Europe and only has 3 environmental health officers.

Response from the panel: Mary Glendon MP

These comments will be passed on to the Minister after the meeting.

Response from the panel: Keith Ritchie, Beama

These points are in the White Paper and the APPG will continue to push for action.

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Question: Mike Leonard, Building Alliance

Asked the Minister to deal with the issues of the existing 26 million housing stock. Interventions have been wrong in the past and ventilation is key.

Comment: Derrek Crump, UKIEG

The solution for VOCs has to be source controlled – ventilation is not the only answer, it's the products in the home that need to be tackled. Compounds linger in the home – what needs to be done is reduce the release from the products used via source control.

Question: Jenny Boyce, Eon Energy

With regards to Retrofit, the importance of cross departmental working and funding is huge. In Staffordshire, they have brought together a holistic package for retrofit across health, energy, housing and funding. The evidence shows cross-funding helps.

Response from the panel: Jade Lewis, Saint-Gobain

Unfortunately, if the Government Departments cannot see the value in these things then they are not progressed. We have seen that industry data is not considered as much as Government's own data, so we need work together to get the right credible data and feed it into the policy making process.

Question: Louise Clanfield, National Energy Action

Will the Government take action in the upcoming CSR for funding to tackle fuel poverty?

Response from the panel: Jade Lewis, Saint-Gobain

The White Paper looks at all aspects of health and wellbeing, including energy efficiency, and we would urge the Government to do the same.

Question: David Trew, The Association of Noise Consultants

The NPPF is allowing office buildings to be turned into poor quality flats and Local Authorities don't have the power to set standards – how can we give them more power?

Closing remarks Mary Glendon MP

This is a not a revolution but an evolution and another great step forward in the campaign for healthy homes and buildings. All the remarks made today will be taken forward and we will continue to push for change.

Mary thanked everyone for attending and contributing to this important meeting, Kit Malthouse MP for his response to the White Paper recommendations and the sponsors for their support of the group.

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