



From the Parliamentary
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Dear Francis

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During Child Poverty Bill Committee sessions last week, you invited me to write you about Social Housing and Traveller children.

Social Housing

In 1997 this Government inherited a £19 billion backlog of repairs to the local authority housing stock, with over two million homes below a basic standard of decency. We made tackling the problem a priority and since then over £33 billion, of which £21 billion came from Government, has been invested in social housing. The number of non-decent social homes has been reduced by more than one and half million, with over 1.4 million council homes having had works done to them since 2001. As a result, nearly 86% of all social homes are now decent. By 2010 we expect that 92% of all social homes will be decent and we still expect the majority of landlords to make all their stock decent by that time.

The Government is also committed to the delivery of additional affordable homes for social rent and low cost home ownership. We provided information on spend by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) on affordable housing from 1997/98 to 2007/08, in answer to a Parliamentary Question on 30 March 2009 in the House of Commons. I have attached it as an annex to this letter for ease of reference.

In 2008-09 the HCA spent around £2.6 billion through their national Affordable Housing Programme, and over the two years 2009 to 2011 we will be investing £7.5 billion through the HCA Agency for the provision of affordable housing.

We know that there are perceptions that the way social housing is allocated is biased in favour of migrants. While these perceptions are not founded – in fact the evidence shows that migrants are accessing only a small proportion of social housing and that most of those who are recently arrived in the country are living in the private rented sector – we know they are strongly felt.

That is why in *Building Britain's Future*, published at the end of July last year, the Prime Minister made clear that he wanted to make it easier for local authorities to give more priority to local people and those who have spent a long time on a waiting list. On 4 December last year the Department of Communities and Local Government issued new guidance to local councils on the allocation of social housing, encouraging councils to make more use of existing flexibilities to put in place simpler allocation schemes which take into account local needs and local priorities. It also encourages them to do more to tackle the myths and misperceptions around social housing by engaging with their communities in setting their allocation policies and explaining to them who is getting into social housing. This will ensure that local views are reflected in local allocation policies and that these policies are better understood and have greater legitimacy

The Government strengthened the regulations on access to social housing for foreign nationals in 2004 and again in 2006. As a result, most foreign nationals who have recently come to England are not eligible for social housing. Foreign nationals who are eligible housing will have their housing needs considered against those of all other eligible applicants in accordance with the local housing authority's allocation scheme. Foreign nationals do not get any extra priority.

I also said I would write on the Government's low cost home ownership schemes. There are two main products - shared ownership and shared equity - available to households with an income of less than £60,000 who could not otherwise afford to buy without support. In response to the current economic climate we also introduced HomeBuy Direct and Rent to HomeBuy. Homebuy Direct enables eligible applicants to buy a new build property in specific developments with a loan of up to 30% (made up of 15% from the developer and 15% from the Government) which can be used towards a deposit. Rent to HomeBuy enables prospective purchasers to rent new build property at subsidised rent for up to five years with the opportunity to save for a deposit and buy on shared ownership terms.

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) children

You also asked questions about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) children. I can confirm that GRT children are *not* all excluded from the targets. Some GRT families live in permanent addresses for extended periods and would be covered by the targets. Those who live on Traveller sites with postcodes can also be covered.

I can assure you that we are continuing to improve and monitor outcomes in the following areas:

Education

The Department for Children Schools and Families also has a number of initiatives to improve outcomes for GRT pupils, including the National Strategies managed GRT Achievement Programme; an e learning and mobility programme which keeps travelling children in touch with their schools through the provision of laptops; and the national introduction of Home Access for low-income families (providing internet access at home). In addition, the local authority based Traveller Education Support Service works in partnership with parents, schools and other public services.

Government PSA 11 aims to narrow the gap in educational achievement between children from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers. Children from Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller backgrounds are captured by this target. Meanwhile, Local Authorities are required to set local targets for raising the educational attainment of Black and minority ethnic groups, which include Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller children. These targets ensure a focus on the educational needs of GRT children.

Housing and living standards

The 2004 Housing Act introduced arrangements to increase the supply of suitable Gypsy and Traveller site accommodation. In addition, local housing authorities are now required to assess Gypsy and Traveller accommodation need and to develop strategies to meet that need. Significant Government Gypsy and Traveller Site grants have already led to an extra supply of around 500 pitches since 2006.

The 2008 Housing and Regeneration Act contained a measure to ensure that residents of local authority Gypsy and Traveller sites have the same security of tenure as any member of society residing in a mobile home. This addresses the threat of short notice eviction to which site residents were previously subject.

Communities and Local Government has also issued guidance for Local Authorities on good practice in designing Gypsy and Traveller sites, and similar guidance on site management was published late last year. These both contain material intended to secure a safe and peaceful environment for Gypsies and Travellers and their children.

Census

For the first time, "Gypsy or Irish Traveller" will be included as an ethnic group category on the 2011 Census. This will improve understanding of the size and nature of the Gypsy and Irish Traveller community in England and Wales and help Government to plan services that are more in tune with the needs of Gypsies and Irish Travellers.

I hope this response has been of assistance. I have copied this letter to all Peers who have spoken at Committee and will arrange a copy to be placed in the House Library.

Yours Sincerely
B.M.

Bill McKenzie

Annex

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how much her Department and its predecessors have spent on the provision of affordable housing in each year since 1997; and what forecast she has made of such expenditure in each year to 2011, at 2008-09 prices. [266317]

Mr. Iain Wright: The table shows spend by the Homes and Communities Agency through the Affordable Housing Programme from 1997-98 to 2007-08.

30 Mar 2009 : Column 971W

	<i>£ million</i>
1997-98	727
1998-99	732
1999-2000	815
2000-01	830
2001-02	823
2002-03	1,030
2003-04	1,805
2004-05	1,624
2005-06	1,598
2006-07	1,923
2007-08	2,004

The indicative allocations for 2009-10 and 2010-11 for the AHP are £3.5 billion and £2.3 billion respectively. At 2008-09 prices these would be £3.43 billion and £2.21 billion respectively.

Expenditure that may be made by local authorities using their resources from CLG to provide affordable housing has not been included.