

House of Commons: Written Statement

Department for Communities and Local Government

Written Statement made by: **Minister of State for Housing and Planning (Brandon Lewis)**.

Local Plans

We are committed to a planning system that provides communities with certainty on where new homes are to be built. Local Plans produced in consultation with the community are therefore the cornerstone of our planning reforms.

During the previous Parliament, the Government enabled this locally-controlled, plan-led approach by abolishing the top-down regional strategies and by replacing over 1,300 pages of central government guidance with the 52-page National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

These changes have already achieved significant results. Local Plans adopted since the NPPF was published allocate substantially more housing than those adopted before the NPPF, and 261,000 homes were granted planning permission in the year to March – the highest annual total since before the 2008 economic crash.

Since the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, local authorities have had more than a decade to produce a Local Plan. Most have done so – 82 per cent of authorities have published a Local Plan. Action is required to ensure that all local authorities meet the standards already achieved by the best.

As stated in the Productivity Plan we will publish league tables setting out local authorities' progress on their Local Plans. In cases where no Local Plan has been produced by early 2017 – five years after the publication of the NPPF – we will intervene to arrange for the Plan to be written, in consultation with local people, to accelerate production of a Local Plan.

Local Plans that are brought forward should meet local needs by being produced in good time and being kept up to date. They should be sufficiently clear and concise to be accessible to everyone with a local interest.

Local authorities cannot plan in isolation. They must work together to provide the land for the housing needed across housing market areas. The NPPF is clear that where local authorities cannot meet their housing needs in full, they should co-operate with other local authorities to do so. We will strengthen planning guidance to improve the operation of the duty to co-operate on key housing and planning issues, to ensure that housing and infrastructure needs are identified and planned for. It is particularly important that this co-operation happens where our housing needs are greatest.

We will continue to support local planning authorities in plan-making, through the Planning Advisory Service, with support from officials of my Department and the Planning Inspectorate.

We recognise that those councils who produce a Local Plan have committed considerable resources, as have others contributing to its development. They should be able to rely on Planning Inspectors to support them in the examination process. I have made it clear to the Planning Inspectorate that this support must be provided. In particular, Inspectors should be highlighting significant issues at an early enough a stage to give councils a full opportunity to respond.

As we have made clear in planning guidance a commitment to an early review of a Local Plan

may be appropriate as a way of ensuring that a Local Plan is not unnecessarily delayed by seeking to resolve matters which are not critical to the plan's soundness or legal competence as a whole. The Planning Advisory Service has published a note on where Local Plans have been found sound, subject to early review, which local authorities should consider.

The Secretary of State has today written to the Chief Executive of the Planning Inspectorate, and a copy of the letter placed in the Library of the House. The Planning Inspectorate will also be reviewing its procedural guidance to ensure that all Local Plan examinations take full account of the overarching approach we have set out.

The package of measures set out in this statement will help to accelerate house building over the next five years, provide certainty for local residents and enterprises, and contribute to the Government's long-term economic plan. I will update Parliament as appropriate on the work the Government is undertaking in support of plan-making progress, and how we will take these measures forward.