

Find out if your council is building enough new homes

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Don't blame only developers and nimbys for the housing crisis. Analysis of the latest government data shows that a third of all English councils are failing to construct enough homes, and that those being built are often in the wrong places, allowing the most desirable property locations to remain untouched.

Last month the government published the results of its Housing Delivery Test, which aims to hold local authorities to account for providing new homes, and the headline figure was positive. About 247,000 homes were built in England during 2019, 9% more than was recommended by the government.

Dig a little deeper, however, and eight councils, including the City of London, New Forest, Three Rivers and North Hertfordshire, have built less than 45% of their allocated target, leaving them vulnerable to sanctions. These councils had an average house price of £386,000, considerably more than the English average of £249,000, according to the Office for National Statistics.

Yet in other areas, generally in the north, where land values are lower, local authorities such as Northumberland, Carlisle and Eden are all building in excess of 200% more homes than required. Four times as many houses as needed have been constructed over the past three years in Burnley, Lancashire, where the average house price is just £92,000.

Redditch, in Worcestershire, with a population of 110,000, delivered nearly 1,000 homes in the period — yet the government's formula called for just two more.

Local councils may be getting closer to the government's oft-repeated target of building 300,000 homes a year, but the focus on one overall national figure misses the bigger picture. Are the right homes being built in the right places?

"The biggest problem is that people may accept the fact that a large number of homes are being built nationally, but they still don't seem to be available near them at affordable prices," says Martin Gaine, founder and chief executive of the planning appeals firm Just Planning. "The most desirable and wealthier places have much more organised and motivated residents.

"Politically, it's easier to deliver homes where the locals are slightly less likely to protest than it is in a rich London neighbourhood or in a picture-postcard village where residents go up in arms against new developments."



Four times as many homes as needed were built in Burnley, Lancashire

ALAMY

Kensington and Chelsea, one of the most affluent and exclusive districts in England, fell well short of the housing targets, building only 57% of what was required.

In 2018-19, just 51 homes out of a projected 733 were constructed in the borough — theoretically not even enough to rehouse those who lost their homes in the Grenfell Tower disaster nearly three years ago. The average house price in the area is about £1.3m.

Kensington and Chelsea council said it has asked the mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, to amend the borough's target from 733 to 448 a year. The proposal is being evaluated by the housing secretary, Robert Jenrick. "Bringing forward plans for developments to meet the land buffer is a serious challenge, but we are putting in place plans for new homes," it said. "This includes our own New Homes Delivery Programme, investing £250m into building 600 homes in the borough — at least 300 for social rent, and directly targeting those most in need of a home. We expect the first tenants to move in from March 2022."

Last year it emerged that the borough was considering building extra storeys onto existing blocks.

Haringey, in north London, is one of the few councils in the capital where the mayor has taken drastic measures to force it to meet targets by "calling in" previously rejected planning applications. The council has built only 55% of its required homes in the past three years — about 2,500 out of a target of 4,500.

Haringey complained in 2017 after the mayor's office called in two developments that were initially rejected. The mayor noted at the time that Haringey had "struggled to meet its London Plan housing targets over the past five years".

Sadiq Khan's office said: "The mayor will continue to use all the powers at his disposal to call in and improve planning applications that fall short of providing the new housing that Londoners desperately need."

According to Dean Clifford, co-founder of the development company Great Marlborough Estates, the Housing Delivery Test numbers show "the scale of the challenge facing London in particular". Yet bashing local authorities isn't the answer: "Many council planning departments are underfunded and under-resourced after nearly a decade of cuts."

The National Audit Office has previously pointed out that councils are often unable to negotiate with developers, which leaves areas of the country vulnerable to housing shortages or situations where the wrong homes are built in the wrong places. On top of this, planning budgets have been cut by almost 40% since 2010.

With just 88 homes built over the past three years, the City of London is the worst local authority on the housing target list, having reached only 32% of its target. Yet the City of London Corporation has rebutted the figures and requested an amendment, saying the test does not take into account a large-scale development at Sugar Quay that delivered 165 new homes in 2018-19.

Tower Hamlets has the most ambitious target of any local authority. The government had demanded that it build more than 10,000 houses over the past three years. The borough delivered a respectable 7,780 — the sixth highest of any on the list, but not enough to avoid potential sanctions.

Polly Neate, chief executive of the housing charity Shelter, said: “Slapping unachievable housebuilding targets on overstretched councils, then penalising them when they can't fulfil them, is not the answer to ending the housing emergency. Councils have extremely limited funding and powers to build the homes they are being asked for.”

She added: “What's even more ridiculous is that the government's targets don't include a requirement to build any social housing — the genuinely affordable homes that this country is crying out for.”

THE FACTS

Planning budgets have been **cut by almost 40%** since 2010

In 2018-19, only **51 homes** out of a desired 733 were built in Kensington and Chelsea

Eight councils, including New Forest and North Hertfordshire, have built **less than 45%** of their allocated targets

Four times as many homes AS needed were built in Burnley, Lancashire

Only 88 homes built over the Past three years in the City of London