1.5M New Homes:
The Local Government Challenge

Sponsored by Red Loft

Unlocking Housing Delivery

Reflections and Recommendations
from the Breakfast Roundtable

15 July 2025

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1. Executive Summary

This report captures the insights, priorities, and recommendations from a breakfast roundtable held on 15 July 2025, convened by the *1.5M New Homes: The Local Government Challenge* campaign. The session brought together senior figures from local government, developers, advisors and policy organisations to explore how councils can contribute to the national ambition of building 1.5 million new homes—and, following recent Government initiatives and the Comprehensive Spending Review, what else is required.

The discussion focused on four themes:

- What's Working
- Barriers and Fixes
- Collaboration Opportunities
- Local Levers

The goal: to produce **sharp, usable insights for MHCLG**—ideas they can act on.

2. Campaign Context

Through interviews and discussions, we dive into what works and what needs to change to build more new homes, focusing on the vital role of councils and the challenges they face.

If the Government's mission is to deliver 1.5m new homes during this Parliament, then its key delivery arm is local government - either as planning authority, or in joint venture with the private sector, or through direct delivery.

So, we're giving a voice to officers, members and leaders, to enable the Government, delivery partners and council colleagues to hear from the people at the "coalface" of delivery, the ingredients for successful new homes delivery and the blockers that need to be overcome to get even more homes built.

Visiting a different council each month, we produce a month's worth of video interviews from each, recorded on location, to understand their experience of viability, s106, skills development, partnership working, local engagement, construction supply chains, sustainable design, building safety and much more.

The *1.5M New Homes* campaign has:

- Gained **1,400 LinkedIn followers**, with over 111,000 impressions
- Clocked 18,000 views and 301 hours of watch time on YouTube
- Reached **45,000 views** on TikTok and **4,357 accounts** on Instagram

This roundtable builds on that momentum by bringing together almost all of the participants in the campaign to date, to turn attention into policy-shaping insight.

3. Participants

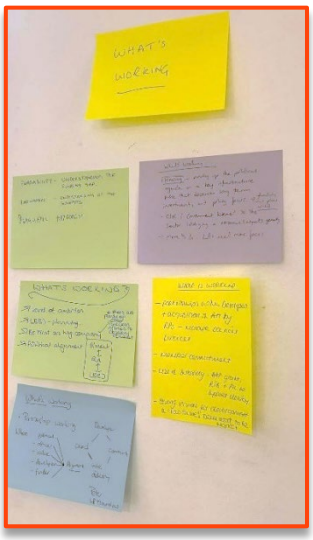
Attendees included representatives from:

- Local authorities across London. Slough, Cambridge and Stevenage
- Policy and skills development organisations
- Developers, architects, and regeneration specialists
- Campaign sponsors and delivery partners

4. Format

The session was structured around four discussion rounds, supported by post-it note contributions.

Participants were invited to speak candidly, with the assurance that all insights would be synthesised and circulated before submission to MHCLG.



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5. Recommendations for MHCLG

Trust councils to lead delivery	Councils have the relationships, land and local insights to deliver homes at scale. Reward those who build with flexible funding and infrastructure support.
Streamline building safety regulation	Fix Gateway 2 delays and pre-empt Gateway 3 confusion. Provide clear guidance, proportionate risk frameworks, and support for building control teams.
Invest in skills and workforce development	Launch a national campaign to attract young people into planning, surveying and construction. Reopen pathways for European workers with settled status.
Shift funding from revenue to capital	Councils are spending millions on temporary accommodation and housing benefit. Capital investment unlocks permanent solutions.
Simplify procurement	Adopt two-stage tendering, early supplier engagement, and open-book models. Reduce sunk costs and accelerate partnerships.
Coordinate public land release	Expand One Public Estate with stronger incentives and clearer delivery mandates. Unlock small and large sites across boundaries.
Support estate regeneration	Recognise the long-term value of estate renewal, especially in London. Provide upfront funding and flexibility on tenure mix.
Respond to the crisis with urgency	Treat housing delivery like a national infrastructure priority. Use carrots, not just sticks, to reward councils that deliver.
Enable cross-boundary delivery vehicles	Support joint housing companies and institutional investment models that operate across boroughs and regions.
Link housing to health, social care and climate goals	Encourage schemes that integrate supported housing, green infrastructure, and community wellbeing.

6. Summary of discussions

6.1. What's Working

What's the best thing Government has done so far to unlock housing delivery—and why did it work?

Councils that are delivering successfully tend to operate with a mixed economy approach—balancing self-delivery, enabling roles, and strategic partnerships. This flexibility allows them to tailor delivery models to site conditions, financial constraints, and political appetite. Crucially, where government policy has provided clarity, consistency, and support, councils have been able to respond with confidence and scale.

One of the most effective enablers has been the **Affordable Homes Programme (AHP)**. Councils are using AHP grants in combination with Right to Buy receipts and Planning Infrastructure Levy (GLA) funds to unlock stalled sites and support tenure mix. The availability of capital funding—when predictable and sufficient—has allowed councils to plan strategically and invest in long-term delivery vehicles. Post-it contributions highlighted the importance of ringfencing grant pots for SMEs and supported housing, suggesting that targeted funding can catalyse delivery in underserved areas.

Government's **ambition for housing delivery**, particularly the 1.5 million homes target, has sent a strong signal to the sector. Councils reported that this national narrative has helped build political confidence locally, attract talent, and justify bold decisions. Where central government, the GLA, and boroughs are aligned—on funding priorities, planning reform, and infrastructure investment—delivery accelerates. Participants cited examples like Be First in Barking and Dagenham, where political alignment and a clear mandate have enabled rapid progress.

The **One Public Estate programme** and Homes England's strategic partnerships were also seen as positive levers. Councils that have engaged with these initiatives are unlocking public land, coordinating across departments, and accessing technical support. Master planning, supported by government frameworks, has helped councils manage growth and infrastructure in a coherent way. Some participants noted that government's responsiveness to lobbying and research—particularly around planning flexibility and housing as infrastructure—has begun to shift the tone of engagement.

Finally, the **increased visibility of housing in national policy discourse** is having an impact. Councils feel more empowered to treat housing as a strategic priority, not just a statutory obligation. Long-term investment strategies, 10-year funding plans, and recognition of housing's role in health and economic development are helping local authorities make the case for delivery internally and externally.

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6.2. Barriers and Fixes

What's the biggest thing getting in the way of scale—and how can MHCLG or councils remove that barrier?

The most urgent barrier identified was building safety regulation—particularly Gateway 2 delays and the anticipated confusion around Gateway 3. Officers are paralysed by liability fears, and developers are avoiding height and complexity. Hundreds of completed homes remain unsigned-off due to building control uncertainty. Post-it notes echoed this concern, describing the system as "built on fear" and calling for outsourcing models that build capacity and assurance.

Skills shortages are systemic. Councils and developers alike are struggling to recruit surveyors, planners, architects, and asset managers. Brexit has compounded the issue, shrinking the European workforce and limiting access to skilled labour. Participants called for a national campaign to attract young people into the built environment, and for pathways to bring back European workers with settled status. The sector also needs better coordination across public agendas—housing, health, transport, and land release must be aligned to unlock delivery.

Funding uncertainty is another major constraint. Councils cannot commit to schemes without knowing what grant levels will be available or on what terms. Post-it notes highlighted the need for upfront capital to unlock stalled sites, especially those with historic sunk costs. Estate regeneration, while essential, is expensive and politically sensitive. Councils need flexibility on tenure mix and long-term funding to make it viable.

Procurement was repeatedly flagged as too slow and rigid. Councils must adopt strategic allowances, two-stage tendering, and open-book models to reduce sunk costs and accelerate partnerships. There was also concern about over-reliance on social rent, which can stall schemes due to viability challenges. Participants urged MHCLG to treat housing as a national asset—not a liability—and to shift funding from revenue to capital to enable permanent solutions.

6.3. Collaboration Opportunities

How could councils and developers better share risk, data or delivery capacity?

Trust emerged as the cornerstone of successful collaboration. Councils and developers must invest time in relationship-building before legal structures are even discussed. Partnerships thrive when there is clarity, shared vision, and respect for complementary skills. In some boroughs, developers lead on community engagement; in others, councils do. Flexibility and mutual understanding are key.

Procurement reform is essential to collaboration. Long, complex processes deter good partners and waste public money. Post-it notes called for two-stage tendering, early supplier engagement, and simplified frameworks. Councils must also align internally before engaging externally—mixed messages undermine trust and slow progress. Mediation roles, such as those played by Be First, help bridge cultural gaps between public and private sectors.

Leadership means prioritising and accepting risk. Too often, partnerships are designed to avoid failure rather than enable success. Councils must be clear about their top priorities and accept that not every scheme will be perfect. Post-it contributions emphasised the need for psychological safety, grown-up conversations, and systems designed to succeed—not just to prevent failure.

Investment partnerships and joint housing companies were discussed as promising models, but only if they have scale, leadership, and focus. Councils must make themselves attractive as partners—presenting coherent visions, financial stability, and cultural fit. Knowledge sharing across partnerships can reduce duplication and improve outcomes. Risk sharing must be explicit and proportionate to build trust and protect public value.

6.4. Local Levers

If we can't change legislation, what practical tweaks—funding pots, guidance, powers—could unlock progress fast?

Councils have a range of tools at their disposal—but they must be used strategically. Internal alignment is essential. Councils that bring planning, housing, highways, and legal teams together early can avoid internal conflict and accelerate delivery. Post-it notes stressed the importance of breaking down silos, engaging hidden teams, and aligning departments at programme start.

Political support is non-negotiable. Officers need backing from members to take risks, negotiate deals, and drive delivery. Estate regeneration, listed buildings, and small sites offer untapped potential—but require upfront investment and cross-party commitment. Councils must sweat their assets, recycle CIL, PIL, and RTB receipts, and leave no funding stone unturned.

Funding should be catalytic, not just compensatory. Councils must use public money to crowd in private investment. Sales and marketing skills are underdeveloped in local government—planners and regeneration officers need better tools to communicate the borough's offer. Councils must also shape the narrative around development, not just approve it.

Infrastructure must be front-loaded. Transport, utilities, and social infrastructure need to be planned early to support housing delivery. Councils should propose solutions to central government, respond to consultations, and use umbrella bodies to amplify their voice. Strategic thinking must complement firefighting—while day-to-day pressures are real, councils need capacity to plan for long-term impact.

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7. Key Messages to MHCLG

We asked participants to reflect on session and say, in one sentence, what they most hoped MHCLG would take away from the discussion.

"Reward councils that deliver. Housing delivery deserves infrastructure funding."

"Flexibility is key. Aggregated funding unlocks more homes."

"Urgency, respect, capital."

"Coordinate public land release. Offer tax breaks for small builders."

"Trust us. You've started to listen- continue to do so"

"Housing supply is a continuum- new build, asset reuse, temporary accommodation. Policies must link."

"Housing is an asset, not a debt. Subsidised housing must be subsidised."

"We're at a crisis point. Be pragmatic. Just get stuff built."

"Grow the workforce. Relax Brexit norms. Bring back European workers"

"Think about legacy- climate, health, design, mixed communities"

"Shift from revenue to capital funding. We're spending on hotels, not homes."

Appendix: Participants and Organisations

- **Toby Fox** – 1.5M New Homes: The Local Government Challenge (chair)

Local Authorities

- **Gerry Ansell** – London Borough of Brent
- **Jonathan Kay** – London Borough of Brent
- **Sarah Lovell** – London Borough of Enfield
- **Peter O'Brien** – London Borough of Hounslow
- **Adam Tucker** – London Borough of Sutton
- **Caroline Harper** – Be First / LB Barking and Dagenham
- **Kathryn Eames** – London Borough of Lambeth
- **Ben Binns** – Cambridge City Council
- **Ash Ahmed** – Stevenage Borough Council
- **Pat Hayes** – Slough Borough Council

Developers and Housebuilders

- **Andy Bugler** – Bugler Developments
- **Jamie Hunter** – Hill Group
- **Mathew Evans-Pollard** – Hadley Property Group
- **Marcus Bate** – Mount Anvil
- **Matt Smith** – Wates Residential

Policy and Skills

- **Anna Clarke** – The Housing Forum
- **Nicola Mathers** – Future of London

Advisors

- **Danny Sutcliffe** – Red Loft
- **Neil Jervis** – Red Loft
- **Luke Tozer** – Pitman Tozer Architects / Architects Action for Affordable Housing

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