

November 2020

As the Council Leader in a local authority where Clarion Housing Group has a significant number of homes, I wanted to provide you with an update on the work we have been doing to support residents and our views on some of the major issues for our sector.

From now onwards, we plan to write to you in this format every six months and the next edition will have a more granular focus on activity in your local authority. I would welcome your feedback on this note and what local activity you would like to hear about from us in six months' time. Please don't hesitate to contact my team [publicaffairs@clarionhg.com](mailto:publicaffairs@clarionhg.com), or me directly [clare.miller@clarionhg.com](mailto:clare.miller@clarionhg.com).

Clare Miller, Group Chief Executive



## Covid-19

Covid-19 has dominated our operating environment since March 2020 and I am immensely proud of how quickly colleagues across the business adapted to maintain a continuity of service and support for our 125,000 households. The focus of this update is broader than Covid-19, but I wanted to highlight three points:



Since the start of the pandemic, we have made more than 80,000 calls to our older and more vulnerable residents, supporting them to access any additional support they need



Our charitable foundation (Clarion Futures) has continued to support people into work and we have directly helped 900 people into new jobs since April. We are also heading a coalition of more than 80 organisations bidding for the Kickstart fund – so we can help hundreds more young people into employment



We maintained our emergency repairs service throughout the pandemic and despite the new national restrictions taking effect from the 5 November, we will continue to operate a normal repairs service with all colleagues operating under Covid secure rules

## Insight into the lives of residents

Each year we conduct a survey across a representative sample of 2,000 of our residents to gain insight into their experiences, feelings and challenges. This year, we added questions relating to the pandemic and the survey took place between 16 May and 24 June, just as lockdown restrictions were being eased.

More than eight out of ten residents (86 per cent) said that they were coping well during the pandemic. The vast majority, 89 per cent, “feel they belong in their neighbourhood”, and 66 per cent would like to see more social rented homes in their area – demonstrating the strength of support for investment in new social housing.

More than four out of ten (43 per cent) residents were in some form of paid employment, with almost half (46 per cent) being public sector workers. Of those in work, 27 per cent were furloughed, 12 per cent had their hours cut and seven per cent had lost their jobs due to lockdown.

We saw that younger people appear to have borne the brunt of the pandemic. Those aged 18-24 were most likely to have had their hours cut, been furloughed or made redundant, with one in four (24 per cent) of this age group reporting they were not coping well during the pandemic - higher than any other age group.

One in seven (16 per cent) of those aged 65+ said that their mental health deteriorated during lockdown compared to one in three (30 per cent) of those of working age.



You can read the full report on Covid-19 on Clarion residents [here](#).

## Our repairs service

Since the start of this pandemic, we have prioritised the repairs needed to keep our residents and communities safe. Adopting Covid safe ways of working, we gradually increased the non-emergency repairs we were able to complete and we have now returned to our standard repairs service.

Nine out of 10 residents are happy with the work we do to fix problems with their homes and in 93.5 per cent of cases, we are able to sort things out in just one visit.

We also help with common problems they may have in their homes, with step-by-step DIY videos showing how to tackle simple repairs such as unblocking drains or bleeding radiators.

And residents are given advice on simple ways they can help prevent problems such as condensation. These include practical tips such

as running cold water into a bath before adding hot water - something that reduces steam by 90 per cent.

Residents are able to report and book repairs through our website. To help make sure they get the right help, they are also able to go online to identify the specific problems that they need fixing and enable our staff to respond accordingly. And our introduction in the summer of the ‘On My Way’ app lets residents now track our repair staff and get updates on their estimated time of arrival.



## Fire safety

Since the Grenfell Tower fire we have spent £50 million on fire safety work. We have made excellent progress with our remedial programme and our in-house fire safety experts continue to work with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and sector bodies such as the National Housing Federation to share best practice.

We appreciate the requirement for EWS1 forms is currently creating a very frustrating situation for some shared owners and leaseholders wishing to move or remortgage. We are doing all we can to support them.

While it is not a statutory requirement, the vast majority of lenders and valuers are requesting this form. There are only a handful of consultancies able to complete these new assessments, mainly due to the exacting

qualifications required and difficulties of surveyors securing professional indemnity insurance.

Where work is required, we must take a risk-based approach to the buildings we prioritise. Every housing provider has to make these decisions and whilst it would be ideal to remedy all the issues together, there just isn't the capacity in the construction industry to do so.



We are committed to working with government, lenders and the industry to resolve this situation. The single biggest benefit would be more funding from government for buildings under 18 metres high, but we also would like to see more explicit guidance, detailing where EWS1 forms are not required, so we can focus on the work that is needed in taller buildings.

## Supporting people into work

We are one of the largest providers of employment support and over the last two years have helped around 8,000 people into work. Our teams provide assistance with everything from job brokerage and interview preparation to vocational training and upskilling and help with childcare costs. We also offer digital skills training and help to get online.

We have adapted at pace to the pandemic and are especially proud to have supported a further 900 people into work since April this year. Our services have quickly adjusted to supporting people remotely and we have created new guidance that helps people to prepare for online interviews and excel in our increasingly online job market.

Young people have been more likely to lose their jobs during this pandemic and we are

determined to support our younger residents as best we can. Clarion has set up the Kickstart Housing Network, a consortium of housing providers and other organisations bidding for the government's new Kickstart employment programme for 16-24 year olds. To date, more than 100 organisations have joined the Network and we expect it will provide at least 800 work placements for young people in the first six months, 300 of which will be within Clarion.



# Affordable Homes Programme

At Clarion our mission is to provide good quality and affordable housing to people failed by the market and we provide housing at a range of price points.

We welcome the grant money made available for social and affordable rent in the government's Affordable Homes Programme (AHP). Demand for social housing will only rise as a result of the pandemic and while we increased the number of new homes for social rent we completed last year there is still a national shortfall.

The major change in the AHP is that funding is contingent on all homes including the right to shared ownership. We await further details, but this is the first time that funding for social housing has been made contingent on ownership. We do not believe this policy will help the development of social homes, desperately needed by people with annual incomes typically well below £18,000 per year.



Separately, we are a long standing provider of shared ownership housing. We built more new shared ownership homes than any other provider last year and have helped thousands of people onto the housing ladder. Our experience is that the current shared ownership model works well and we will continue to invest in it, as a product with a crucial place in mixed communities.

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## Planning consultation

Clarion supports the ambition to reform the planning system, in order to enable the construction of many more homes.

However to frame planning as the main barrier to the delivery of more and higher quality homes is to fail to take account of the complex interactions of the whole housing system, and how this is constrained or facilitated in particular localities. We need both local targets and some specific national guidelines.

During and after the pandemic, social and affordable housing for rent are going to provide a safety net for the poorest families, and also the basis for economic and social recovery for the many essential workers that the sector houses. Clarion would argue that local social rent housing targets are required, not just for the broader affordable category.

The biggest risk to provision of genuinely affordable social housing in these proposals is the uncertainty around the removal of S106. No evidence has been provided to support the assertion that the proposed new infrastructure levy will deliver at least as much affordable housing as now.

Any reduction in the supply of affordable housing will have a disproportionate impact on low income households, households on local authority waiting lists and those at risk of homelessness. This is something we want to work with government to avoid.



# Tackling fuel poverty

Some 2.4 million households in England struggle to heat their homes, a figure set to rise due to the impact of Covid-19 on jobs and livelihoods.

Clarion is a leading supporter of a new campaign launched by fellow housing association, the Home Group, earlier this year to lobby government and energy suppliers to help end fuel poverty.

Backed by more than 30 housing associations and organisations, the campaign is calling for a one-off Covid winter fuel payment of £300 for vulnerable households; and to extend the criteria for existing winter fuel payments to those below pensionable age.

We also want to see the removal of standing charges for those who are struggling to heat their homes, and to work with government and industry to make it simpler and easier for people suffering fuel poverty to get the support that is available.

We help our residents stay warm and save money on their heating bills through advice and support from Clarion Futures, as well as our ongoing work to improve the energy efficiency of our homes.

In the last financial year alone we spent more than £10 million making homes more energy efficient, helping our residents save more than an estimated £360,000 on their utility bills in the process. We are working to ensure that all properties have an Energy Performance Certificate rating of at least D by 2025.



We're sounding a call to improve **affordable housing** in the UK



**CLARION**  
HOUSING GROUP