



**Get Britain Growing:
South East Conference**

***Healthy Homes,
Healthy
Communities***

**Housing
Sprint One Report**





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Peter Lamb, the Member of Parliament for Crawley, and Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Wellbeing Economics, chaired the discussion.

Foreword

Housing is one of the defining political and moral challenges of our time. It sits at the intersection of fairness, opportunity, health, and economic security. However, for too long, it has been treated as a narrow policy silo rather than the foundation on which people build their lives. This Sprint session was convened in recognition of a simple truth: if we are serious about improving health outcomes, reducing pressure on public services, and creating resilient communities, we must start with the homes people live in.

I come to this discussion not only as a Member of Parliament, but as someone who has spent many years in local government, grappling with the practical realities of housing delivery. I have seen firsthand how decisions made in Westminster land in council offices, housing departments, and living rooms. I have also seen the consequences when policy ambition is not matched by delivery capability or joined up thinking. Housing is where those gaps are felt most acutely.

Across the South East, the pressures are intense. Demand for housing continues to grow, driven by population change, economic patterns, and displacement from higher-cost areas. At the same time, councils face constrained land supply, stretched infrastructure, and rising costs. The result is a system that too often responds to crisis rather than preventing it. Temporary accommodation, overcrowding, and poor-quality housing are no longer edge cases; they are becoming structural features of the system, with profound consequences for health, education, and wellbeing.

What was striking about this Sprint was the breadth of experience around the table and the consistency of the diagnosis. Councillors described families being moved miles away from their communities, children losing access to schools and GPs, and adults struggling to maintain work. Health leaders spoke about preventable demand flowing into the NHS, driven by damp homes, cold conditions, stress, and isolation. Infrastructure providers highlighted the difficulty of retrofitting solutions into places that were never designed with integration in mind. Despite coming from different perspectives, participants were describing the same problem.

One of the clearest messages to emerge was that housing cannot be separated from health. The home is where people recover, age, raise families, and manage long-term conditions. When homes are unsafe, cold, overcrowded, or disconnected, the consequences show up elsewhere in the system. We see it in respiratory illness, in mental health pressures, in delayed hospital discharge, and in escalating social care needs. Treating housing as a downstream issue, rather than a preventive intervention, is a false economy.

The Sprint also challenged us to confront the reality of digital exclusion. We live in a society where access to services, employment, and support increasingly assumes a level of digital connectivity. Yet millions of people, particularly in social housing, remain effectively offline. This is not a marginal issue. It affects the ability of residents to book GP appointments, engage with schools, apply for jobs, or manage their finances. It also constrains the ability of public services to modernise and deliver care more efficiently.

Participants emphasised that this is not only a question of resident access, but a practical constraint on delivery. Without reliable connectivity, councils and housing providers struggle to identify voids and empty homes quickly, monitor property condition, or spot emerging risks before they become crises.

Despite significant national investment in digital infrastructure, too many social homes remain unconnected or reliant on insecure, short-term mobile data. This is not simply a technical failure; it is a policy failure. We would not accept homes without electricity or water, yet we have normalised a situation in which lack of connectivity locks people out of modern life. The Sprint was clear that this must change.

Several contributors argued that the same standard should apply to broadband: treating connectivity as optional has normalised exclusion and left services unable to modernise at pace.

What I found most encouraging was the shift in the conversation from problem description to practical solutions. Rather than debating abstract targets, the group focused on a concrete proposition: the idea of the connected home. This is not about technology for its own sake. It is about recognising that reliable, affordable connectivity enables better housing management, more preventive health and care, and greater independence for residents. It creates the conditions for services to work together rather than in silos.

The Connected Homes model discussed in this report is deliberately pragmatic. It acknowledges the realities of different sectors, the need for partnership and the importance of trust. It also recognises that connectivity alone is not enough. Skills, support, and clear governance are essential if technology is to empower rather than exclude. Above all, it places residents at the centre, focusing on what enables people to live healthier, more secure, and more connected lives.

This Sprint was not about producing another report that sits on a shelf. It was about identifying an intervention that can be tested, refined, and scaled. The proposals set out here are grounded in lived experience and delivery insight. They offer a way of aligning housing, health, and infrastructure policy around shared outcomes, rather than competing priorities.

Housing policy will always involve difficult choices. There are no simple fixes, and no single intervention will solve every challenge. But if we continue to treat housing as separate from health, digital infrastructure, and prevention, we will continue to pay the price elsewhere in the system. This Sprint points to a different approach, one that starts from the home as the foundation of wellbeing and builds outwards.

I would like to thank all those who contributed to this session for their honesty, expertise, and willingness to engage across boundaries. The task now is to turn these ideas into action. That will require leadership at national and local level, sustained commitment, and a willingness to work differently. The opportunity, however, is significant: healthier communities, more sustainable public services, and a housing system that truly supports the people it is meant to serve.

Peter Lamb MP
Member of Parliament for Crawley
Chair, All Party Parliamentary Group for
Wellbeing Economics





Attendees of the sprint represented a variety of sectors, including local government and business leaders from across the South East.

Executive Summary

The Sprint examined the relationship between housing quality, digital exclusion, health outcomes, and public service delivery. Participants highlighted that many of the most acute pressures on the NHS, adult social care, and local government budgets are rooted in the conditions in which people live.

A central challenge identified was digital poverty within the social housing stock. Despite significant national investment in fibre infrastructure, the majority of social homes remain unconnected or reliant on insecure, pay-as-you-go mobile data. Participants were clear that this represents a market failure: those households who would benefit most from connectivity are least able to access it under current commercial and eligibility models.

The Sprint also highlighted the operational implications for councils. Around 90 per cent of the 4.4 million social homes in the UK do not have access to fixed broadband, limiting proactive housing management, preventing early identification of mould and deterioration, and reducing the capacity to reinvest savings into communities.

This lack of connectivity restricts access to healthcare, education, employment, welfare support, and community services, while also limiting councils' ability to manage housing assets effectively and health systems' ability to shift from treatment to prevention. The Sprint explicitly framed digital connectivity as a preventive infrastructure intervention, aligned with the NHS's long-term shift towards technology-enabled care and population health management.

The group coalesced around a single, high-impact proposition: a Connected Homes model for social housing. This would combine universal digital connectivity with integrated data use, enabling better housing management, more efficient service delivery, and improved outcomes for residents, while supporting wider economic participation and local growth.

Key Recommendations Included:

 Recognising digital connectivity as core housing infrastructure

 Treating social broadband tariffs as a market failure requiring intervention

 Embedding digital requirements within planning and housing standards

 Using connected homes as a foundation for preventive health and care

 Piloting place-based connected housing programmes at scale



Attendees identified a variety of barriers that challenge growth in the South East, and came up with innovative solutions that could work across multiple sectors.

Context and Challenges

Housing, Health, and Inequality

Participants emphasised that poor quality and insecure housing is a major driver of ill health, mental distress, and social isolation. Temporary accommodation, overcrowding, and displacement across local authority boundaries were highlighted as particularly damaging, disrupting access to schools, employment, healthcare, and support networks.

The South East faces acute pressures due to population growth, high housing costs, and constrained land supply. Councils described a system where demand far outstrips delivery capacity, while existing homes are often poorly utilised or inadequately managed.

Digital Poverty and Exclusion

In the Sprint discussion, participants also returned to pressures linked to homelessness, void properties and empty homes, and the financial and operational consequences for councils when stock cannot be brought back into use quickly.

A recurring theme was the scale of digital exclusion within social housing. Fewer than one in ten social homes are connected to full fibre, despite national infrastructure investment. Many residents rely on shared mobile devices and limited data allowances, creating barriers to accessing digital-first public services.

Speakers noted that digital exclusion is not only about access to services. It constrains councils' ability to manage properties: without connectivity, issues such as damp and mould are identified later, vulnerabilities go unseen, and intervention remains reactive.

Social broadband tariffs exist but are difficult to access, requiring online applications, credit checks, and long-term contracts that many low-income or vulnerable residents cannot meet. As a result, those who would benefit most from digital access are least able to secure it.

Fragmented Data and Siloed Working

The group highlighted persistent data silos between housing, health, social care, utilities, and central government. Multiple agencies often hold overlapping datasets on vulnerability and need, yet lack mechanisms or permissions to share them effectively.

Participants stressed that this is not simply a technical issue, but an accountability one. No single organisation currently owns outcomes across housing, health, and connectivity, resulting in fragmented delivery and missed opportunities for early intervention.

This lack of clear ownership prevents early intervention, drives duplication, and leaves families interacting with multiple services that do not see the full picture of their circumstances.

Infrastructure and Planning Gaps

Participants argued that planning decisions can be highly sensitive to issues such as parking, yet rarely treat lack of digital infrastructure as a reason to refuse or redesign a scheme. This embeds exclusion at the point new communities are created.

Participants noted a disconnect between housing delivery and wider infrastructure planning. Water, drainage, health facilities, and digital infrastructure are often considered too late, leading to developments that fail to support healthy, resilient communities.

Local plans tend to focus on housing numbers rather than the quality, connectivity, and service integration required to support long-term wellbeing.

Core Proposition: Connected Homes

The Sprint group identified a Connected Homes model as the most effective intervention capable of addressing multiple challenges simultaneously.

What is a Connected Home?

A connected home is one with reliable, affordable broadband connectivity built in as standard.

This connectivity enables:

- Access to digital healthcare and social care services
- Participation in education, training, and employment
- Improved housing management and asset monitoring
- Remote support and virtual service delivery
- Data-driven early intervention and prevention

Why Connectivity Matters

Participants argued that digital connectivity is now as fundamental as electricity or water. Without it, residents are excluded from core aspects of modern life, while public services are unable to operate efficiently.

Connectivity enables councils and housing providers to monitor damp, mould, voids, and energy use, improving housing quality and supporting Net Zero targets. It also allows adult social care and health services to shift from reactive, face-to-face models towards more preventive, flexible support.



Participants identified policy areas that need to be prioritised to support regional growth.

Policy and Delivery Enablers

Legislative and Regulatory Change

The group discussed the case for recognising broadband connectivity as a basic housing standard. Options include

- Requiring connectivity in all new social housing
- Linking digital infrastructure to planning approval
- Establishing minimum connectivity standards for rented homes
- Participants acknowledged delivery challenges within a competitive telecoms market, suggesting a need for partnership models rather than unfunded mandates on landlords.

Social Tariff Reform

Access to affordable broadband must be simplified. Participants were clear that existing social tariffs are failing to reach those most in need, due to complex application processes, digital-only routes, credit requirements, and long-term contracts.

The group explicitly characterised this as a market failure, arguing that reliance on voluntary provision alone is unlikely to resolve the issue. Potential approaches include automatic eligibility, offline application routes, shorter contracts, and integration with existing benefits systems.

Local Authority Leadership

A consistent message was the need for councils to work collectively to create scale and certainty for delivery partners. Participants suggested that central government may need to support this through statutory requirements or incentives, to avoid a postcode lottery in access to affordable broadband.

Speakers also stressed the importance of designing connectivity into retrofits and new developments as standard, starting with local authority housing stock and housing associations.

Councils can embed digital infrastructure within local plans, regeneration programmes, and housing strategies. By acting as anchor clients, local authorities can help de-risk investment and enable providers to connect harder-to-reach homes.

Skills and Support

Connectivity alone is insufficient without support. Digital skills training, device provision, and trusted local intermediaries are essential to ensure residents can use technology confidently and safely.





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Curia, Golden Cross House, 8 Duncannon St, London WC2N 4JF.
Email: team@curiauk.com

www.curiauk.com