



Ministry of Housing,  
Communities &  
Local Government

**Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local  
Government**

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Our Ref: 4408373

Your Ref:

Date: **6 September 2019**

Dear Mr Bartlett,

Thank you for your letter of 19 August to the Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP about the standard method for calculating local housing need which is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework. We have been asked to reply on behalf of the Secretary of State, as our Team has responsibility for national planning policy on housing.

We would start by emphasising that a housing need figure is not a mandatory target. Local authorities should make a realistic assessment of the number of homes their communities need, using the standard method as the starting point in the process. Once this has been established, planning to meet that need will require consideration of land availability, relevant constraints such as Green Belt, and whether the need is more appropriately met in neighbouring areas.

We would also advise that the use of the standard method is not mandatory. Our planning practice guidance sets out that local authorities may use an alternative approach where it is felt that circumstances warrant this. However, local authorities can expect this approach to be scrutinised more closely by the Inspector appointed to examine the Local Plan. There is an expectation that the standard method will be used, and that an alternative approach will only be used in exceptional circumstances. The relevant guidance is available here:  
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-and-economic-development-needs-assessments>

The circumstances in which the Secretary of State may wish to intervene in plan making were set out in the Housing White Paper '*Fixing our Broken Housing Market*' in February 2017. Based on these criteria, the then Secretary of State wrote to 15 of the worst performing local authorities in November 2017, in order to notify them that they were at risk of intervention.

To date, the Secretary of State has commenced intervention action in two authorities (Wirral and Thanet), and a decision on Castle Point will be made in due course. Plan making progress for the remaining 12 authorities continues to be monitored. There are no plans to extend that programme to include other local planning authorities at present. The Housing White Paper can be accessed at the following link:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/590464/Fixing our broken housing market - print ready version.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/590464/Fixing_our_broken_housing_market_-_print_ready_version.pdf).

The revised Framework maintains the policy that only in exceptional circumstances may a Green Belt boundary be altered, using the Local Plan process of consultation with local people, followed by examination of the revised Plan. The Framework also now makes such exceptional circumstances clearer: a local authority can propose to alter a Green Belt boundary only if it can show evidenced justification that it has examined all other reasonable options for meeting its identified development needs. This includes making the most efficient use of land and exploring whether neighbouring authorities can accommodate this need. The Planning Inspectorate should have regard to these policies both in determining planning appeals and in examining Local Plans.

Thank you, once again, for writing.

Yours sincerely,

*Paul Hillier*

**THE PLANNING POLICY AND REFORM DIVISION**