Policy Focus – October 2026

POLITICS

Autumn party conferences

Contrasting ideas from the main Westminster political parties this autumn:

- **Labour** – pledged to support a major council housebuilding programme, with strict restrictions on the Right to Buy for new social homes. Housing Secretary Angela Rayner outlined new powers for councils to refer homeless households directly to housing associations and to intervene against rundown private properties and absentee landlords. The Prime Minister also suggested a new National Care Service, partly funded by removing the Pensions Triple Lock from 2030.

- **Conservative** - proposed abolition of Natural England and the Environment Agency to prevent them from blocking infrastructure and homebuilding. The party also suggested scrapping Net-Zero Targets and the Future Homes Standard. Leader Kemi Badenoch announced that a future Conservative government would abolish inheritance tax on family homes and raise the tax-free estate threshold.

- **Liberal Democrats** - committed to building 150,000 new social rent homes per year and giving local councils the authority to end Right to Buy in their areas. The party also suggested abolishing leasehold and developing 'Heat Ready' standards for new developments.

- **SNP** - set ambitious targets to deliver tens of thousands of social and affordable homes across Scotland, plus plans for long-term rent controls, stronger protections against eviction, and enhanced rights for private and social renters.

- **Reform UK** – suggested banning foreign nationals from social housing and evicting existing foreign national tenants after a short period, with future priority for British-born workers under 35, married couples with children and military veterans, all subject to being in active employment. The party pledged to deliver 50,000 new affordable social homes annually.

- **DUP** - reported a 17% increase in social homes completed last year and emphasised the removal of intimidation points from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) selection scheme. The party also highlighted the £100 household oil support scheme and other targeted help for heating and energy costs.

- **Green** - promised a mass expansion of council housing, with abolition of the Right to Buy, council buy-back powers, and new provisions to acquire private properties that are empty, poorly insulated or failing standards. The party also proposed phasing out private landlords and an emergency three-year cap on private rents, to prevent them rising faster than consumer price inflation , wage growth or 2% (whichever is lowest).

- **Plaid Cymru** – committed to delivering at least 20,000 new social homes by 2030, backed by the Right to Adequate Housing and the National Development Body, Unnos. The party also proposed private rented sector reforms and a review of councils' second home and holiday let policies.

2026 budget changes

The King's Fund has published a useful explainer about the key changes to housing, health and social care finances announced by Chancellor John Healey.

LAW & REGULATION

Social Housing Bill

The Social Housing Bill completed its House of Commons committee stage on 3 November, and in will now proceed to the report stage in its amended form. The Bill makes significant changes to the Right to Buy in England, gives affordable housing providers and investors greater confidence to build more social homes, and strengthens protection for residents who experience domestic abuse.

How the law handles age discrimination

Centre for Ageing Better has published a report examining whether the current framing of age in The Equality Act 2010 risks promoting the message that ageism is more acceptable than other prejudices. *Left out by the Law* highlights weaknesses in existing approaches to age discrimination, and suggests how it could be improved to protect us all as we grow older.

Competence and Conduct Standard now in force

The Regulator of Social Housing's Competence and Conduct Standard came into force from 1 October 2026 as part of the implementation of the 2023 Social Housing Regulation Act. Larger registered providers (with more than 1,000 homes) have three years to comply; while smaller providers (with fewer than 1,000 homes) have four years.

The Standard requires senior housing managers and executives to hold, or be actively working towards, regulated qualifications. In partnership with Kingdom Academy, erosh offers the Level 4 Certificate in Housing Practice (Independent Living Pathway), which is specifically for people working across independent living and sheltered housing. The next cohort starts on 28 January 2027.

Regulator of Social Housing

HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE

Big Conversation and Public Panel on Care

The Big Conversation on Care will reopen later this year to feed into Baroness Casey's independent commission on adult social care.

In the meantime, 125 people from across the country will be randomly selected to form the Public Panel on Care, who will meet regularly to work through the big questions about care in more depth.

THE BIG CONVERSATION ON CARE
Help shape a fairer future

Social Care policy and evidence

The King's Fund has set out proposals for a reformed adult social care system in England. *Equal Access: A Fairer System of Social Support* calls for interlocking changes to universal access, with co-payments; a cap on care costs; national funding; an 'equal access' national assessment process; clear individual entitlements to support; and a focus for local authorities on joining up care, housing, health and other services around the individual.

The King's Fund
Bold thinking for better health

International Longevity Centre UK has published analysis from the UK Better Lives Index to highlight the best and worst places to be born, grow up and grow old. *Inequality Street* finds that the worst-off fifth of local authorities has 25% fewer good-quality care options, relative to need, than the best-off fifth. It concludes that the care gap is driven largely by poorer health, and that provision of local social care services does not match this greater need.

Dementia-ready homes

Housing LIN's **Dementia and Housing Working Group held a webinar on 20 October 2026:** Dementia Across the Four Nations - Showcasing Innovation, Best Practice and Housing Readiness Across the UK.

Healthy Ageing – physical activity in an ageing society

The UK government has published its response to the recommendations made by the House of Commons' Health and Social Care Committee in its Healthy Ageing: physical activity in an ageing society report, published on 22 May 2026.

While as a nation we are living longer, too many people are spending their older years in ill health. The government plans to address this through the 10 Year Health Plan: fit for the future

Planning for extreme heat

Following Britain's hottest ever summer, which saw record numbers of heat-related deaths (especially among older people), housing providers need to plan ahead and make provision for expected similar and more extreme conditions in 2027 and beyond.

The Chartered Institute of Housing has published a guide to heat adaptation, and in Wales, the Senedd Research Service has published an article looking at extreme heat in Wales, its causes, impacts and adapting to this new normal.

The challenge now is to develop both strategic and emergency responses to ensure year-round thermal resilience, including:

- Proactive welfare checks for higher-risk residents
- Cool spaces for refuge and recovery
- Passive mitigation like solar shading (blinds, awnings, windows and roof coatings) and enhanced ventilation
- Heat network checks to stop unwanted heat being supplied to homes during warm weather
- Smart monitoring with sensors to track real-time indoor temperatures, humidity and CO2.

With summer 2027 and beyond expected to be even hotter than this year, erosh is running a free, bitesize training session on what providers need to be doing now on 26 January 2027.

Protecting residents from extreme heat

The ARCADE project led by University College London is looking for test sites and case studies to support its government-backed research into practical solutions to protect older and vulnerable residents from overheating in their homes. Members can contact the UCL team if their organisation is be interested in taking part in this evidence gathering and work to find effective ways of addressing extreme heat.

Telecare and the Digital Switchover

The Department of Health and Social Care has published new guidance for housing providers in England on telecare and the digital switchover in support of the National Telecare Action Plan. This sets out the essential steps organisations should take to help safeguard telecare users during the digital phone switchover by the end of January 2027, including information on data sharing, fire safety and options for upgrading analogue systems.

Department of Health & Social Care

Use of AI in specialist and supported housing and care

Housing LIN has published a State of the Nation Report on how the specialist and supported housing industry is making use of artificial intelligence, and its potential to transform future strategy, practice and standards.

A webinar on 8 October discussed this fast-changing aspect of modern life and business.

Housing LIN
Connecting people, ideas and resources

Care England has also published a report on the use of AI in care.

Staying safe online

October was Cyber Security Awareness Month, reminding everyone to be aware of potential threats and to use the online and digital service with caution. Independent Age has updated its guidance on staying safe online.

INDEPENDENT AGE
Let's end financial hardship in later life

PATNERSHIPS & FUNDING

£3 million SHAPE Challenge Fund now open

Suitable Housing for an Ageing Population Evidence (SHAPE) Exchange has launched its SHAPE Challenge Fund to offer a total of £3 million to support local partnerships across the UK to become SHAPE sites. The Fund aims to turn evidence on housing and ageing into practical action, supporting ambitious, place-based approaches that improve homes and communities and help people live well as they age. The emphasis is on practical implementation and lasting change, with learning from SHAPE sites shared across the UK.

Independent Age – new brand, same vision

Independent Age has launched a new look – marking 160 years of standing beside older people facing financial hardship. Their vision remains the same: every older person should be able to afford to live well.

The Independent Age free helpline is open 8.30am-5.30pm Monday to Friday, 0800 319 6789.

STRATEGY & PRACTICE

Future of Ageing conference 2027

Expressions of interest are now open to attend the 2027 Future of Ageing conference in London on 4 March 2027. This event is the platform where research is launched, ideas are tested, and the people who shape policy meet the people who live its consequences. The decisions being made right now – on pensions, on social care, on where we live and how we work – will define the quality of longer lives for decades.

Out of work, not retired – FREE webinar

There's a free, one-hour webinar at 2.30pm on Monday 30 November 2026 to explore the NETR phenomenon – people aged between 50 and state pension, who are not in Employment, Training, Education or Retirement. This accounts for one in five (2.9 million) people in this age cohort across the UK.

Centre for Ageing Better
Action today for all our tomorrows

Homesharing – another way to stay independent

Homeshare Week 2026 recently promoted homesharing as an important intergenerational living choice, which is often overlooked in UK housing policy and practice.

homeshare uk

What's on your doorstep? – International Day for Older Persons

Centre for Ageing Better marked this year's International Day for Older Persons by producing some great resources on the theme of What's on your doorstep? The materials give practical advice on developing age-friendly communities to promote better quality of life and combat loneliness and isolation.

Centre for Ageing Better
Action today for all our tomorrows

DATA & EVIDENCE

Very old people in the UK

The Office of National Statistics has released its annual mid-year population estimates of people aged 90 years and over in the UK, by sex and single year of age up to 105 years and over. The bulletin explores changes in the size and age structure of the oldest population over the past 20 years and compares trends across UK countries.

Office for National Statistics

Attitudes to retirement

Standard Life Centre for the Future of Retirement has published its *Retirement Voice 2026* - the annual study of attitudes towards work, pensions and later life in the UK. Based on research with 6,000 people, this year's findings explore how people's hopes for retirement compare with the realities they expect to face, and what this means for individuals, industry and policy makers.

- 63% of people not yet retired worry they're not saving enough for when they're older
- 35% of those not yet retired have done no planning for their finances in retirement
- 75% think retirement in the future will be more complex than it is now.

Standard Life Centre for the Future of Retirement

UK Housing Review Autumn Briefing

The Chartered Institute of Housing and University of Glasgow have published an Autumn Briefing Paper. It assesses national and regional changes since the full UK Housing Review 2026 was published in March.
Four dedicated pages cover specific developments in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and in London.

Chartered Institute of Housing

NORTHERN IRELAND

Future Needs of Older People in Northern Ireland

The Age Friendly Network NI has published the report of its Survey on the Future Housing Needs of Older People. Based on interviews with people aged 50+. The report recommends more age-friendly housing, greater accessibility, action on heating/cooling and a duty of social care for older people.

WALES

Future of older people's housing in Wales

The Chartered Institute of Housing and erosh are running a joint webinar on 9 December 2026 to explore the opportunities, challenges and innovations shaping housing for older people across Wales. This event is free for members of CIH and erosh.

Steps towards a National Care Service

The Welsh Government has set out a National Care Service Programme to create a more consistent and sustainable care system that puts people first. This builds on the Programme for Government commitment to ensure people can access high-quality, joined-up care and support wherever they live in Wales.

Housing with Care Fund (HCF) evaluation

The Welsh Government has published an evaluation of how effective the HCF has been in supporting ageing populations to live independently with care and support at home.

Practical steps for climate resilience

The Welsh Government has also produced a short video highlighting how climate change is affecting services across Wales. It pinpoints simple actions staff can take to prepare for extreme weather events.

Get in touch

If you have any queries about this issue of *Policy Focus*, please contact policy@erosh.co.uk. Members can also keep up to date with the weekly Policy News on our website.