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HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP  
Minister for Housing and Local Government  
Department of Communities and Local Government  
Eland House  
Bressenden Place  
SW1E 5DU

24<sup>th</sup> November 2011

Dear Grant

**Re: Affordable Housing Statistics**

I am writing to you further to the issue I raised in Business Questions today regarding the release of Affordable Housing Statistics by the Homes and Communities Agency.

On Monday, you launched the Housing Strategy for England, calling it a "housing revolution". As you know, much of the contents of this announcement was pre-briefed to the press in contravention of the conventions of the House.

On the following day, statistics were quietly released by the HCA regarding affordable housing showing a total 99 percent fall over the last 6 months, the biggest fall in affordable house building on record.

These statistics clearly would have allowed for a better informed public and parliamentary debate on the Housing Strategy and this Government's housing record.

I understand that the Department for Communities and Local Government were told on the 19th October that the figures would be published this week. Given that you had ended Labour's Affordable Housing Programme and cut funding to affordable housing by £4 billion last year, you must have been aware a month ago that these figures would not be a "good news story" for the Government. Indeed your department has subsequently excused these disastrous figures by saying that they were expected because "the delays in new starts were due to contracts under the new housing schemes not yet being in place".

I also understand a number of staff at the Department concerned, including a Special Advisor to the Communities Secretary, were on a pre-release access list for the statistics.

The Code of Practice for Official Statistics says Ministers "must ensure that no statement or comment -based on prior knowledge - is issued to the press or published ahead of the publication of the statistics" and reminds them of their duty "to promote trust and maximise public value".

In light of what has now emerged, I would ask that you answer the following questions:



- 1) Did any discussions take place between you and your officials and/or the Prime Minister and Downing Street officials on the timing of the release of the housing strategy in relation to the publication of these statistics?
- 2) If such a discussion did take place did you not consider it more appropriate to time the release of the Housing Strategy after the release of these statistics to allow a better informed public debate and debate in Parliament?
- 3) If such a discussion did not take place, do you not think it should have? In order to avoid the perception that the Government is news-managing the publication of official statistics, is it not the role of Ministers to consider the timing of political announcements?
- 4) At what point were those on the pre-release access list informed of the content of the statistical release?
- 5) At what point were you made aware of the content of the statistical release?
- 6) Do you agree, that in light of the publication of these statistics, that by timing the housing strategy the day before the release of this statistics we were not able to have the most informed public and parliamentary debate?
- 7) Will you agree to hold a debate, in Government time, on this Government's commitment to affordable housing?

People across our country are desperate for good quality, affordable housing. As a direct result of decisions you have made they have not been able to get this. These statistics show that the responsibility for that lies solely with your Government. These figures demonstrate the damage done by your Government in ending Labour's Affordable Housing Programme.

Furthermore, you have trumpeted last year's record-breaking affordable housing building figures but these figures show that they were the result of Labour's Affordable Housing Programme, and when you abolished that, building of homes came to a virtual standstill.

The £400million you announced on Monday for housebuilding represents just a tenth of the cut made to the affordable housing budget last year. The 3,200 affordable homes announced will not even cover 10% of the fall in the affordable homes starts in the last 6 months.

You owe the public in need of homes an apology.

In light of the public interest in this matter, I have released a copy of this letter publicly.

I look forward to your swift response.

Yours sincerely



**Jack Dromey MP**  
**Shadow Minister for Housing**