

Andy Street, Mayor of West Midlands, Speaks to Switchee Summit



Andy Street at Switchee Summit 2024

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On 28th February Matthew was at the annual Switchee Summit. This year Andy Street, Mayor of the West Midlands was the Keynote speaker.

In a frank address to the audience, the mayor had a focused talk on the quality and quantity of housing in the West Midlands. Street began with a graph showing that building houses in the Midlands was consistently above estimated figures. Which was a positive. But he stated, “our record on social homes is not good enough.” This will be addressed with a “numerical association at the next election for social homes.”



Housing Standards are Not Good Enough

At present, large proportions of the Midlands social homes are not to standard. The key factors raised in the speech were that “there needs to be a focus on mould and damp. At present 36,000 homes are classified as not decent.” His honest opinion was that the “quality of the homes is not the best.”

When questioned about the quality of social housing properties a member of the audience noted that housing associations are using “reactive housing repairs rather than development of new properties.” Another member of the audience noted from the housing associations that they are “running out of money.”

Financing for Improvement to Homes

In response, the mayor stated that “improvement to the future home standards have to stretch.” When the finances were discussed in more detail it was clear that central Government needs to be used to support. One option for this is “money that is not being spent by Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities ([DLUHC](#)) has got to be used more wisely.”

Monitoring Homes for Moisture and Damp

In discussion about the monitoring of the homes through the Switchee control system it is becoming clearer that as Street said “not enough progress has been made on the links between health and housing.” This again was in reference to the level of damp and mould being report in properties across the UK. The [Switchee](#) system provides a touchscreen option for residence to control their heating and monitor other elements such as moisture in their homes. The key feature of the system is to provide a dashboard of these measurements to the housing association or maintenance company. These flag homes that are not using their heating properly or have a higher risk of mould

in their homes.

This monitoring is important as “the Midlands has the highest areas of fuel poverty and must be addressed with a mass scale retrofit. Currently 300,000 needs retrofit. 3000 are being worked on at the moment.” Street ended the speech saying that “to hit targets this needs a private sector backing.” This was again referencing Government support and possibly even funding from pension funds.

Matthew noted that “the Switcher event has been a positive step to highlight the issues that all housing associations are currently experiencing. The pace of retrofit is simply not enough to reach the net zero targets of 2050 as there are so many issues with current housing stock. Unfortunately, without higher levels of retrofit it is more than likely going to leave a lot of residence in uncomfortable homes whilst also paying higher fuel bills.

“More must be done to provide quality homes across the UK. A leading message from all the HA groups were that prevention is better than a cure. This is where the VENTI equipment can support.”