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Michael Gove Profile – Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

Michael Gove is the newly appointed Secretary of State of Levelling up, Housing and Communities. He was appointed to the position in September 2021 and quickly changed the name of the Department, formerly known as the *Ministry for Housing, Communities, and Local Government*. Gove has an extensive history in politics and has been a Member of Parliament since 2005. He studied in both England and Scotland, and after graduating from university, he started a career in journalism. He has worked for *The Times* and other influential media outlets.

In most recent years, Gove has had plenty of Government experience serving as the Secretary of States for the *Department of Justice, Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and Department of Education*. Gove's main interests are rooted in education but did spend some time as shadow minister of housing.

He is known for his significant role within Great Britain's campaign to leave the European Union and is known for pushing reform. Gove's entry to this new position came at a time of change within the housing sector following the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower. After the fire, there was shared dissatisfaction with past Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government, Robert Jenrick. Jenrick failed to grasp the severity of the issue. His apologies continued to fall short, leaving the affected communities unimpressed and ready for change. In addition, Jenrick was widely criticized for his slow progress towards reform following the Grenfell Tower fire, and for

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his favourable attitude towards developers that seemed to place profit over tenants. Jenrick's eagerness to intervene for billionaire-developer to avoid over £40 million in community charges, only 24 hours before the charges would have been imposed and against the inspector advice, spoke volumes about where his priorities lay. While the department had to speak on the issue, claiming this decision was not rooted in favouritism, Tower Hamlets council took legal action and Jenrick did admit to showing bias. He was later removed from making any further decisions about the development.

Gove has come at a time for a significant push to reform social housing standards, with the recent release of the proposed Social Housing Regulation Bill and Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs). Gove intends to construct a tenant-focused approach to reforming social housing standards. As of 2 February 2022, Gove has unveiled The Government's "Levelling Up" White Paper, outlining targets for The Government to reach so that every citizen can share in the UK's advancements. Gove wrote,

"This will not be an easy task, and it won't happen overnight, but our 12 new national levelling up missions will drive real change in towns and cities across the UK, so that where you live will no longer determine how far you can go."

There are 12 outlined "missions" (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-unveils-levelling-up-plan-that-will-transform-uk>) :

1. By 2030, pay, employment and productivity will have risen in every area of the UK, with each containing a globally competitive city, with the gap between the top performing and other areas closing.

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2. By 2030, domestic public investment in Research & Development outside the Greater South East will increase by at least 40% and at least one third over the Spending Review period, with that additional government funding seeking to leverage at least twice as much private sector investment over the long term to stimulate innovation and productivity growth.

3. By 2030, local public transport connectivity across the country will be significantly closer to the standards of London, with improved services, simpler fares and integrated ticketing.

4. By 2030, the UK will have nationwide gigabit-capable broadband and 4G coverage, with 5G coverage for the majority of the population.

5. By 2030, the number of primary school children achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and maths will have significantly increased. In England, this will mean 90% of children will achieve the expected standard, and the percentage of children meeting the expected standard in the worst performing areas will have increased by over a third.

6. By 2030, the number of people successfully completing high-quality skills training will have significantly increased in every area of the UK. In England, this will lead to 200,000 more people successfully completing high-quality skills training annually, driven by 80,000 more people completing courses in the lowest skilled areas.

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- 7.** By 2030, the gap in Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE) between local areas where it is highest and lowest will have narrowed, and by 2035 HLE will rise by 5 years.
- 8.** By 2030, well-being will have improved in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing.
- 9.** By 2030, pride in place, such as people's satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture and community, will have risen in every area of the UK, with the gap between the top performing and other areas closing.
- 10.** By 2030, renters will have a secure path to ownership with the number of first-time buyers increasing in all areas; and the government's ambition is for the number of non-decent rented homes to have fallen by 50%, with the biggest improvements in the lowest performing areas.
- 11.** By 2030, homicide, serious violence, and neighbourhood crime will have fallen, focused on the worst-affected areas.
- 12.** By 2030, every part of England that wants one will have a devolution deal with powers at or approaching the highest level of devolution and a simplified, long-term funding settlement.

While unveiling the "Levelling Up" White Paper, Gove stated that his mission for housing is clear: to provide a secure path for greater home ownership, to therefore increase first-time buyers, drive a tenant focused approach to reinforcing decent home

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standards, and a £1.5 billion fund to increase the number of new homes, mainly outside of London and south-east (Gove, 2022). The department will be investing in “20 new urban regeneration projects” focused on the midlands and the north. The emphasis on the growing the north is defended by Gove, as he stated, “A more productive, even prouder and faster-growing north helps improve quality of life and wellbeing in the south, which is why we are refocusing housing investment...” (Gove, 2022). Gove’s main goal throughout the “Levelling Up” plan is to provide equal opportunity for all, regardless of where you live.

Resources consulted

Government unveils levelling up plan that will transform UK

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-unveils-levelling-up-plan-that-will-transform-uk>

Former Tory donor's housing project 'unlawfully approved to avoid £40m hit'

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/may/27/richard-desmond-housing-project-unlawfully-approved-robert-jenrick-isle-dogs-london-avoid-40m-hit>

The Rt Michael Gove <https://www.gov.uk/government/people/michael-gove>

Levelling Up, Volume 708: debated on Wednesday 2 February 2022. House of Commons. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2022-02-02/debates/8CA814BE-BC8E-4B88-A6BD-93A8E14C7128/details#contribution-50970A7B-2318-4498-88E1-4F88ED5A681C>

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