

# Policy Digest

April – June 2007

Issue No. 11

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## Further Information

The Policy Digest provides a review of Northern Housing Consortium policy activity and an update on recent national legislative, policy and regulation issues that have an impact on our members in the North. Visit our [website](#) or contact the NHC Policy section on 0191 566 1000 for further information on the work of the Consortium featured in the Digest or any other policy areas you would like to highlight.

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THE VOICE OF HOUSING IN THE NORTH

- **Brown's Policy on Housing**

New Prime Minister Gordon Brown has pledged to make housing a priority for the Government, promising 'affordable housing for all' and a 'property owning democracy open to all those wanting to get on the housing ladder for the first time'. For the first time in 40 years, the Housing Minister, Yvette Cooper, will attend Cabinet to lead the national debate on 'the new homes we must build'. Brown added, 'we need to build new homes not just to own but to rent, we will bring together the private sector, housing associations and local authorities to renew the promise of social housing for our communities'.

Northern Housing Consortium welcomes the high priority which housing has been given in the new Government and the appointment of northern MP, Hazel Blears to the position of Secretary of State at CLG, but what does this mean for the North, and how will progress be made?

With competing government priorities we know that resources for housing will be stretched in the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review. Whilst housing investment remains a priority for the North our concern is that Brown's commitment to housing will centre on the target to increase the supply of affordable housing in the South. This is of particular concern given the North's track record for 'expensive delivery'.

Tackling the challenges in the North with fewer resources means a change in approach and greater innovation. Innovation in design, environmental standards and quality is crucial. The Government is aware of the slack in Northern balance sheets and expects organisations to make use of assets. In terms of approach, partnerships are the vehicle for future delivery. The important issue is who has the resource, the asset, and the vision; not which sector you belong to. Local authorities as the strategic housing body have an important role to play in bringing forward discounted land. They need a stronger vision and proactive engagement with their partners in local and sub-regional areas. Housing providers are also expected to make better use of their capacity.

But improving stock is not the only answer; it's about recreating new long term sustainable strategies – creating decent places and making them work. The city region debate has focused housing in a much broader economic agenda and this will continue. The North will need to consider where its long term strategies fit into the economy, and where the housing mix fits with other long term government priorities e.g. tackling health inequalities, worklessness and education.

Our objective, under the Investment and Resources theme of our new business plan, is to demonstrate that the northern regions are able to be innovative in their use of resources and investments. We have recently been successful in securing Innovation in Good Practice funds from the Housing Corporation to deliver a two year project exploring ways in which we can improve and maximise the availability of land for the delivery of affordable housing across the North. We also intend to support members through a 'Northern New Approaches to Investment' network which will be developed

early in 2008. If you would like to discuss any of these issues or the IGP work please contact [Charlotte Howse](#), Director of Policy and Practice or telephone 0191 566 1034.

- **Communities England Consultation**

On 17th January, Secretary of State Ruth Kelly announced proposals to create Communities England; a new housing and regeneration agency for England. Communities England will join up the delivery of housing and regeneration, bringing together the functions of English Partnerships, the Housing Corporation, and a range of work carried out by CLG, including delivery in the areas of decent homes, housing market renewal, housing PFI, housing growth and urban regeneration.

It is proposed that Communities England should help to delivery a range of core outcomes, which would include:

- Increasing the supply of housing: including delivering ambitious plans to increase the supply of affordable housing for rent and shared ownership and increasing low cost home ownership;
- Regenerating underperforming urban centres and neighbourhoods to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in England;
- Transforming disadvantaged estates through promoting mixed communities;
- Sustaining strong and stable existing communities by promoting a mix of income, tenure housing type, tackling worklessness, promoting social cohesion and the Respect agenda;
- Using public sector assets (particularly land) more effectively;
- Innovating to improve efficiency, outcomes, leverage, spreading best practice, building capacity in partners and developing skills and knowledge needed to make better places;
- Levering in significant increases in private finance from existing lenders and new institutional investors; and
- Driving the adoption of high and rising environmental standards across the whole market.

At Northern Housing Consortium's 'Leaders in the North' event held in June, delegates heard from Richard McCarthy who spoke about the role of housing in the North from the national perspective. Speaking before the Communities England consultation was published; Richard mentioned that there was an intention for CE to work regionally within an empowered structure, having regional bases and providing scope for regional policy making and flexibility, not just administration. However, within the consultation document, it is only mentioned that Communities England is expected to have both a national and regional **presence**, with offices in London and each of the English regions. NHC will be making the point in our response to the consultation that we would not only like to see CE have a regional presence but that the regional bases should have the powers and capacity to make and influence policy.

CLG is currently consulting on Communities England with a view to legislating at the earliest opportunity. [The consultation](#) runs until 10th September and NHC intends to respond to it. If you would like to contribute to our response, please e-mail [Charlotte Howse](#), Director of Policy and Practice or telephone 0191 566 1034.

- **NHC Member Roadshows**

NHC would like to invite you to join us at one of our three regional roadshows in July:

**North East – 17<sup>th</sup> July, Wynyard Park, Tees Valley**

**Yorkshire and Humberside – 18<sup>th</sup> July, York Racecourse, York**

**North West – 19<sup>th</sup> July, Castlefield Rooms, Manchester**

This is the first year of our new business plan and we have re-invented our approach to service delivery to become more proactive, in order to respond to member needs in the fast changing Social Housing environment. These **FREE** events provide an ideal opportunity to meet the full team and discover our plans to deliver services to you through our current and future workstreams. We would be delighted to welcome you to an event to see how we can support you in your work during 2007 and beyond. This will be a great opportunity for us to meet in a relaxed and informal way with members and hopefully you will take away even more ideas on how to get the best out of your Consortium membership.

Book your place at any one of our [roadshows](#) online at our [website](#).

## Quality of Life

- **Supporting People Strategy and Conference**

**Independence and Opportunity**, the long awaited CLG [strategy](#) for Supporting People, was launched on 20<sup>th</sup> June, signalling the government's commitment to the programme.

The strategy is the government's vision for the future of Supporting People – support for independent living and support for vulnerable people to participate fully in the social and economic life of their communities. This long awaited strategy marks an important milestone by celebrating the achievements and giving a clear direction to the programme. The government has signalled the long-term role of the programme yet makes it clear there is much more to do to improve delivery. The strategy does not address future funding levels or distribution of that funding; these issues will be addressed following the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR). The strategy confirms that the government does not consider it appropriate at this stage to put Supporting People on a statutory footing. Instead it is hoped that the new local government performance framework will provide the right flexibility and ensure services are available.

Independence and Opportunity focuses on the following four key priorities and examples of just some of the commitments within priority are listed below.

**Keeping service users at the heart of the programme and of delivery**

- Enhancing choice and control by using the learning from the individual budgets pilot
- Exploring the inclusion of housing support into joint needs assessments
- Ensuring services are not restricted cross boundary
- Ensuring services clearly set out what services users can expect and exploring the opportunity for 'Charters for Independent Living'

**Building on the already successful partnerships with the Third Sector**

- Three year funding announcement to be made after CSR, with LA's passing certainty onto providers
- Minimising obstacles to prevent good providers from competing fairly
- Sharing good practice and building support and capacity in providers
- Continuing work on VFM and involving service users in strategy and delivery

**Delivering effectively in the new local government landscape**

- Testing impact of delivering Supporting People funding through the new area based grant, aiming to deliver that by April 2009
- Enhanced regional networks and local partnership
- Ensuring a clear understanding of growth in existing, and new, service needs

**Working towards better efficiency and less bureaucracy**

- Roll out of National Value Improvement Programme
- Reduced monitoring requirements

- Regional benchmarking

Run in conjunction with CLG, the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Supporting People Conference [Implementing Independence and Opportunity](#) will examine the key issues in the delivery of Supporting People through the new national strategy. The conference will be held at the **Royal York Hotel** on **13-14<sup>th</sup> September**. Issues to be addressed include:

- How Supporting People will operate within the new local government landscape and the impact on commissioners and providers
- How Supporting People can align better with capital programmes through regional housing strategies
- How the Individual Budget programme will impact on the way services are commissioned and delivered
- What next for the national Value Improvement Programme and what can we expect from the National Strategy on Housing in an Ageing Society?

The conference will be an excellent opportunity to hear the latest on the strategy direct from Government, alongside commissioners and providers outlining their response to the implementation challenges and opportunities. Bookings can be made via the Northern Housing Consortium [website](#).

- **‘People First’ and Tenant Empowerment**

At the end of May, the Housing Corporation launched its new involvement policy entitled [‘People First – delivering change through involvement’](#). This new policy replaces the ‘Involvement Policy for the Housing Association Sector’ which came into effect in April 2004. The updated policy builds on the commitment in the sector to ensure that residents are properly involved and aids housing associations in directing involvement towards achieving positive outcomes for residents, communities and organisations themselves. It is now a requirement under the new policy for housing associations to have at least one resident board member and it is also a requirement to publish an Involvement Statement which has been agreed with residents along with an annual Impact Assessment of this. The policy sets out the basic building blocks of effective involvement which are seen by the Housing Corporation as the minimum standards they expect from associations. It also sets out principles for designing Impact Assessments; however Impact Assessments are to be flexible tools that feed into involvement priorities and drive continuous improvement. The new policy will help to ensure that resident involvement is central to the ethos and integral to the management of all housing associations.

Communities and Local Government launched the consultation document, [Tenant Empowerment](#), on 19<sup>th</sup> June setting out proposals to increase tenant empowerment within social housing, including:

- A new draft Statutory Instrument to simplify the Right to Manage regulations for local authority tenants;
- A proposal to promote a voluntary Tenant Management process for all social housing tenants and landlords;
- A proposal to establish a National Tenant Voice; and

- Proposals to increase tenant voice in stock transfers.

The deadline for submissions is 11th September and Northern Housing Consortium will be preparing a response to the paper. If you would like to contribute to our response or discuss any of the issues raised above, please contact [Jennifer Stevenson](#), Policy and Research Officer or telephone 0191 566 1028.

- **Community Ownership**

Recent legislation and government reports increasingly refer to the role and benefits of benefits of community ownership in fostering a sense of belonging, playing a role in enhancing the environment, alleviating poverty and raising aspirations in the community. Community ownership is being seen as a vehicle for achieving many of the aspirations of government and of communities. The Local Government White Paper, the Public Involvement in Health Bill, the Housing Corporation Neighbourhoods and Communities Strategy and the Quirk Report, Making Assets Work, all highlight that community ownership is a key feature in a range of policies including devolved decision making, community empowerment, neighbourhood regeneration, increasing owner occupation, mixed communities and development of the third sector.

The NHC Annual Resident Involvement Conference on 26-27<sup>th</sup> June 2007 featured a range of presentations on this important area of policy, from early thinking around community land trusts in the North, to key findings from the Quirk Review, to inspiring and replicable examples of best practice including social enterprise in Manchester and the Goodwin Development Trust in Hull.

Northern Housing Consortium has launched a policy and research project on community ownership in the North. Using a series of case studies, the project will explore models of community ownership and examine how they are helping communities, and government, achieve their aspirations, and the potential for them to do so further. We believe the rewards for the housing sector and the communities we work with are clear, and this publication aims to highlight those rewards.

We are seeking case studies of good practice from members engaged in initiatives such as social enterprises, development trusts, and community land trusts as well as any other initiatives involving the community ownership of assets. We are also interested in case studies at the development stage. The case studies will be used to inform a policy and good practice publication to be published in the autumn. If you would be willing to share your experiences and learning please contact [Sarah Mtango](#), Policy and Practice Development Manager.

## Quality of Place

- **Accommodating a Greener Future**

In May, before becoming the new Prime Minister, Gordon Brown set out his plans to build 100,000 green homes within five new eco-towns upon taking up his new position. Councils will be invited to bid to host the settlements which are to be built on brown field land and consist of zero-carbon rated homes, new road and rail links, bus and cycle lanes, schools and health centres, all designed in a way to make a carbon neutral community.

NHC has published a new report, “Accommodating a Greener Future” featuring case studies on what social housing providers are already doing to combat climate change and improve the energy efficiency of their new and existing housing stock as well as within their own organisations. This publication is intended to give housing organisations ideas and inspiration for what they can do to protect the environment and move towards more carbon neutral homes and communities.

Members can now download a PDF version of Accommodating a Greener Future from the Quality of Place section of our [website](#) and there are hard copies available. For more information on our work around housing and the environment or to order a hard copy the publication, please contact [Jennifer Stevenson](#), Policy and Research Officer or telephone 0191 566 1028.

- **Housing in 2020**

The face of housing is set to change over the next decade. Measures are being brought in now, both locally and nationally, that will have a significant role to play in the shaping of our homes, neighbourhoods and day-to-day lives in the future. Using case study scenarios, this latest publication from the Northern Housing Consortium will consider what housing in the North of England will look like in 2020, taking into account recent and planned policy developments and the impact they could have on a range of different household types. The case studies consider issues being raised now by new Prime Minister, Gordon Brown and in various government reports, such as; the delivery of affordable housing, housing and support needs for vulnerable groups including homeless and older people, as well as new models of service delivery such as shared equity and community land trusts. With comments by James Woudhuysen, Professor of Forecasting and Innovation at De Montford University, the publication challenges us to take a very critical and active attitude towards policy developments.

Housing in 2020 will be available at our Roadshows in July. Members can also reserve copies by emailing [enquiries@northern-consortium.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@northern-consortium.org.uk).

- **The Housing Research & Intelligence Conference 2007 – *Closing the Gap between Research and Policy***

Given the release of the new Strategic Housing Market Assessment guidance, along with a range of other Government guidance on improving knowledge and understanding of markets and customers, the importance of excellent data and comprehensive analysis has never been more essential. The pressure to supply evidence and produce timely, accurate and robust

information to drive and review policies and strategies is increasing. The Housing Research and Intelligence Conference 2007 will highlight why data alone is not enough and how only through effective interpretation and analysis of this data, will intelligence improve.

This event will pull together the experience of practitioners; the expertise of consultants and the comprehension of academics. In his keynote address, Professor Steve Wilcox from the University of York will provide information on the availability of regional and local housing statistics and demonstrate their use in understanding both local and regional housing markets. Delegates will also hear from Dr Tim Brown, Director, Centre for Comparative Housing Research, De Montfort University, who was one of the consultants responsible for the Government's updated guidance on Strategic Housing Market Assessments. Tim will give an insight into why this guidance is essential in driving the housing market assessment agenda forward. In addition to this, Northern Housing Consortium and Hometrack are running a professional practice session where delegates will have the opportunity to hear about the services we plan to deliver together in order to assist our members in their understanding of housing markets.

Places are still available at this [event](#) and can be booked online through the events section of our [website](#).

# Performance Improvement

- **The Cave Review**

An [independent review](#) of the regulation of social housing was announced back in December 2006, with Martin Cave, Director of the Centre for Management under Regulation at Warwick University, appointed to lead it. Professor Cave and the team were asked to:

- establish a clear set of objectives for the regulation of social housing;
- present options for reform of the regulatory system and a clear recommendation for a preferred option; and
- allocate regulatory roles and make recommendations about institutional arrangements.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> June, Professor Cave published his report "[Every Tenant Matters – a review of social housing regulation](#)" containing his recommendations to Ministers. The recommendations in the Cave Review will have a major impact on all those organisations working in the social housing sector. The headlines from the Review include:

## **Single Regulator**

Cave recommends a single body to act as regulator for all housing providers. There is indication that those providers should "engage constructively and co-operate with local authorities" but does not make councils regulators.

As to whom the single regulator should be, Cave favours a new body but the Government has not necessarily accepted this.

## **Single Domain**

The Review recommends that a common approach to regulation be applied across the whole domain, irrespective of landlord type. The main reasoning behind this is to allow tenants choice in provider and that choice be based from the same regulatory playing field.

## **Focus on Tenants**

The focus on tenants is the recurring theme throughout the review as can be seen from the title of the report. Cave recommends that the regulator should ensure that choice is promoted to tenants, to include where possible choice of tenure, choice over levels of service and even choice over who manages their home.

There is also a recommendation that a national tenant voice organisation should be established.

## **How to Regulate**

The review recommends that regulation is done primarily on a "co-regulation" basis, which in essence, means that organisations assess themselves, organise voluntary self-help and submit data to the regulatory body. The regulator will become involved where it deems necessary and have a wide range of intervention powers.

CLG are now consulting on Professor Cave's recommendations in Chapter 7 of "[Delivering Housing and Regeneration: Communities England and the](#)

[Future of Social Housing Regulation](#)” and NHC will be responding to this paper. If you would like to contribute to the NHC response, please e-mail [Nigel Johnston](#), Performance Improvement Manager or telephone 0191 566 1006.

In addition to this, Northern Housing Consortium is holding an event on the 4<sup>th</sup> July, “The Future of Social Housing Regulation – The Cave Recommendations Examined” at which Professor Martin Cave will give the keynote address. This event will seek to explore what the recommendations will mean in practice and how the different elements will affect the way housing services are delivered in the future.

- **Positive Practice in Equality and Diversity – A Housing Conference**

Effective equality and diversity strategies and practices remain at the core of housing organisations’ delivery of services. Community cohesion is seen as one of society’s main challenges and the widening of the equality and diversity role in local government and housing organisations is a key feature of Government policy.

This one day conference is intended to support housing organisations to take practical steps to improve performance across the full range of equality and diversity issues and assist in meeting those challenges. It also provides the opportunity to showcase and share good practice and through this give a positive spur to delegates to apply in their own organisations. Delegates will hear from those delivering positive practice, who will spell out what they did and how they did it. They will also hear from acknowledged experts in the field including representatives from Housing Diversity Network, Audit Commission, National Housing Federation and Housing Corporation.

Places are still available at this [event](#) and can be booked online through the events section of our [website](#).

## Investment and Resources

- **Shared Services Research and Conference**

NHC has begun an important piece of research looking at shared services in the social housing sector and the potential for housing organisations to share services with other organisations. Shared services have seen reasonable success in the local government sector and are now emerging as a useful tool for the social housing sector to generate savings, increase value for money and release internal working capital for investment in external growth projects. The research will focus on the practicalities of sharing services, the legal and competitive hurdles, the actual services that can be shared and which services should be shared, as well as monitoring the performance of the service once it is up and running.

NHC are working with Richard Beevers from Customer Plus who brings detailed knowledge of the shared service sector from his experience with Capita. We would like to thank those members who have already expressed an interest in this project and participated in interviews. But there are still opportunities to get involved. We will be conducting an online survey in the summer asking for people's opinions and feelings on the use of shared services in the housing sector. Any members wanting to take part in the survey should contact either [Jennifer Stevenson](#) or [Helen Kerridge](#) in order to receive a link to the survey once it is available. The final research report will be launched at our Shared Services conference at York Racecourse on Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> September, places at which can be booked through our [website](#).

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