

Policy Digest

July – September 2007

Issue No. 12

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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

- **The Housing Green Paper**

On the 23rd July, Communities and Local Government published its Housing Green Paper “Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable” setting out the Government’s proposals to provide more homes to meet growing demand, provide homes that are well designed and linked to good schools, transport and healthcare facilities, and provide more affordable homes to buy or rent. Of key importance to the North of England is the Government’s recognition in the paper that affordability and growth are now *national* issues and no longer a preserve of London and the South East. The scale of the ambition set out in the Green Paper is considerable:-

- £8 billion programme in affordable housing
- 3 million new homes by 2020
- Deliver 240,000 new homes each year
- Deliver 40,000 new social homes per annum
- New Growth Points, including some in the North
- All new homes to be zero carbon rated by 2016
- Encouraging more affordable, longer term fixed rate mortgages
- Wider range of organisations able to build new homes

The Housing Green Paper will have considerable impacts for the housing sector and therefore our members. NHC is producing a member’s briefing discussing the proposals in the Green Paper and their potential effects for housing in the North of England. Some key issues of concern to the northern regions that arise from the Green Paper include:-

- A heavy emphasis is put on the building of new homes and very little mention is made of existing dwellings – some parts of the North do not need increased new supply, the North has some of the highest numbers of empty properties in England; there needs to be a greater recognition of the diverse nature of housing issues in the North;
- There is concern over the future of the Housing Market Renewal programme in the North – the pathfinder areas have not finished their important work, and while some may be in a position to bid for New Growth Point status, this is not appropriate for all and therefore funding for their work needs to be sustained;
- While proposals for new zero carbon homes are extremely welcome, there is little mention of the energy efficiency of the existing stock – the North has high numbers of pre-1919 stock which are much more difficult to bring up to modern energy efficiency standards;
- The move to widen the range of organisations able to deliver affordable housing marks a positive step towards increasing supply and making best use of innovative models of delivery – however, the stipulation that 50% of housing delivered by these organisations must be affordable is not the best approach for the North; some flexibility in this figure in order to respond to local housing markets would be more beneficial in the northern regions.

The briefing will be available at our event, “The Housing Green Paper Examined” on Thursday 4th October at York Racecourse, held in conjunction with Communities and Local Government. With an unparalleled line up of speakers from CLG as well as key, sector experts, the event will explore and consider in detail the challenges and opportunities presented by the Housing Green Paper. Places can be booked online through the event pages of NHC’s [website](#).

If you wish to discuss the Green Paper and the issues for the North further or to obtain a copy of the member's briefing please contact [Satty Rai](#), Policy Services Manager or [Jennifer Stevenson](#), Policy and Research Officer.

- **Communities England consultation response**

On 17th January, Secretary of State Ruth Kelly announced proposals for a new housing and regeneration agency for England. This agency will bring together the functions of the English Partnership, the Housing Corp and a range of work carried out by CLG.

NHC have compiled a response to the consultation that was published in June 2007, looking at it from a northern perspective and how the North would like the new agency to be shaped.

- NHC welcomes the proposal of a new agency, which will result in services being maximised and streamlined, and adopting a holistic approach.
- The general focus of the new agency seems to be on new housing, as well as this the priority for the North is regeneration, and the new agency needs to address this too.
- The Agency must be able to adopt a supportive and flexible approach, taking on board the regional priorities, what will work best for each area.
- Further clarification is required as to how the new agency will relate to the new regional architecture
- A regional presence for the new agency is vital, to understand the needs and priorities of the northern housing markets.
- Flexibility in terms of investment vehicles, and the need for a more streamlined approach for funding, there needs to be some form of alignment of funding, in order to move forward.
- Raising the quality of place for the North and its residential offer is a key priority in order to fulfil economic growth potential and ambition.

Most recently on the 14th September, Housing Minister Yvette Cooper announced that the body will be known as the Homes and Communities Agency. This better reflects its role in delivering new homes and in regenerating existing and creating new communities. Members can view the NHC's full response to the consultation [here](#). If you would like more information, please contact [Satty Rai](#), Policy Services Manager.

- **Sub-National Economic Development and Regeneration Review**

The Sub-national Economic Development and Regeneration Review was launched on the 17th of July by the Treasury as part of a series of cross cutting reviews reporting in advance of the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007. It sets out reforms that the Government feel will enable places, sub regions and regions to provide economic environments that are able to adapt and take advantage of the broad global economic and technological challenges that we face today.

The Review has considerable implications for the housing sector in the North, both in terms of the relationship in terms of housing, economic development and regeneration, the role of the regional housing strategy, the delivery of neighbourhood renewal objectives and the delivery of new affordable housing.

The reforms focus on four key areas:-

- **Empowering Local Authorities** – Members have long recognised the need to understand the relationship between economic development and housing markets. The Review seeks to ensure this economic focus is embedded and strengthened at a local level.
- **Sub Regional/ City Region Working** – This is common place in the housing sector across the three Northern Regions. The challenge for the sector however, will be to ensure that the contributions that the housing sector can make across a range of service targets are acknowledged and linked. NHC would like the impact of housing function to be recognised by Multi Area Agreements and other sub regional groupings.
- **Streamlining and Strengthening Regional Tier** – There is huge value in a single regional strategy which combines economic, social and environmental objectives. Developing the quality of our places is fundamental to support economic growth, therefore a strong link at strategy and delivery levels make sense. The concern for the Consortium would focus on a range of issues being included in any such document and ensuring that housing does not fall between the gaps.
- **Sharpening Government Focus** – the Department for Business , Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (DBERR), acting as central government lead for the RDA's and managing the Regional Economic performance is the best approach, although the DBERR is a new department, and its too early to comment whether it is able to undertake this function. There is a need however for a close working relationship between the CLG and the DBERR at central government levels.

The briefing paper can be viewed [here](#); the Consortium will continue to represent members' views on these issues, and in turn we will be providing formal and informal feedback and response to this debate. For more information on this topic please contact [Charlotte Howse](#), Director of Policy and Practice.

Quality of Life

- **DWP Green Paper – In Work, Better Off: Next Steps to Full Employment**

Northern Housing Consortium intends to respond to the consultation on the DWP Green Paper which sets out the government's vision for achieving 80% employment and an end to child poverty and represents a step change in approach through change in the following areas:-

- More partnership work with employers
- A more personalised flexible approach tailored to individual circumstances
- Integrated skills and employment agenda
- Greater utilisation of expertise across the private and third sectors
- Strengthening of rights and responsibilities, particularly for lone parents

There are clear implications for members in terms of the likely impact the reforms will have on their tenants and future customers. There will inevitably be concerns about reduced income but members can help tenants to manage that transition. However, members must also keep an eye on the long term, responding to the shifting culture and changing markets that will inevitably result. Essentially the reforms are positive and members should welcome them as complimentary to our work on sustainable communities. There is a real opportunity to highlight good practice in developing employment related initiatives and an opportunity to become a third sector delivery partner in the new employment support contracts which will be set up.

A range of actions which members can undertake to support tenants, and prepare for these changes can be found in a Northern Housing Consortium [briefing](#) on the green paper. The green paper and the consultation questions can be found [here](#). In order to represent the views of members accurately we would be keen to hear your comments, case studies of good practice or answers to specific consultation questions. Please send comments to [Sarah Mtango](#), Policy and Practice Development Manager before **Friday 19th October 2007**.

- **Integrated Living Network update**

The Integrated Living Network (ILN) is one of the newest networks delivered by Northern Housing Consortium aiming to support the housing sector to improve the well-being of tenants and the communities in which they live by working in more effective partnerships with health and social care. The network is working with a range of experts to bring outputs which address some of the key future challenges facing our members. These include:-

- Measuring the impact of housing interventions on health
- Implications of Individual Budgets on commissioning and contracting
- Regional models of capital and revenue funding alignment
- Appraisal and sustainability of traditional sheltered housing

We are delighted that **Dr Sohail S Bhatti**, a public health physician with a passion for tackling social exclusion and health inequalities, has recently been appointed as Associate Director (Public Health) of Northern Housing Consortium specifically working with the Integrated Living Network. Dr Bhatti is leading a new Action Learning Group (ALG) of members who will meet over the next 2 years to share

best practice, enumerate the size and extent of any problems in meeting the policy agenda, build support networks and devise new and innovative actions in a supportive environment. In particular the group will be exploring the potential to gather an evidence base of the health and well-being of our communities using key focus areas around the North. For more information on the ILN visit www.integratedlivingnetwork.org.uk or to express interest in being part of the ALG please contact [Sarah Mtango](#), Policy and Practice Development Manager.

- **11th Annual Crime and ASB conference – Positive Solutions for Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour**

This past year we have experienced a movement within The Respect Taskforce which, reflecting the focus on getting to the root causes of ASB, has now moved under the remit of the new Department for Children, Schools and Families.

This two day conference will take stock of the practical remedies available, update delegates on the latest developments, and provide tools to further improve the solutions provided. Speakers include:-

- Ian Brady, Deputy Director, Respect Taskforce
- Stuart Waiton, Director of Generation Youth Issues & Lecturer in Criminology, Abertay University
- Ashley Ames, Research Director, Ipsos-MORI

Issues to be explored are:-

- The Government's latest thinking on tackling Crime and ASB, achievements to date and the future;
- Perceptions of ASB and the variations across the country;
- Paedophobia and the focus on children;
- The performance improvement toolkit – measuring the effectiveness of landlord actions in tackling ASB;
- The Legal update.

The conference will be an excellent opportunity to hear the latest on the developments and changes within the Respect agenda, and how practitioners can continue working towards 'sustaining respect', direct from the Government, and alongside commissioners and providers. Bookings can be made via Northern Housing Consortium's [website](#).

Quality of Place

- **Select Committee Inquiry on Existing Housing Stock and Climate Change**

Northern Housing Consortium has compiled a [response](#) to the Communities and Local Government Select Committee Inquiry on Existing Housing Stock and Climate Change. Northern Housing Consortium welcomes this inquiry as we recognise that this is an extensive problem for the North. The Green Paper has heavily focussed on new homes, however the North has a high number of old stock and there is a need to consider the impacts, effects and long-term sustainability of the existing stock.

The response highlights a number of issues, with the principle point being made that there is a high number of older stock within the three Northern regions. This has serious implications for the impact that the housing stock in the North is likely to be having on the environment.

Local authorities in the three northern regions are amongst the most deprived areas nationally and experience high levels of fuel poverty. There are many contributory factors to fuel poverty including energy inefficient housing, low income and high fuel prices. Being unable to heat your house sufficiently can lead to ill health and housing disrepair. Cold, damp homes have a direct effect on the health of, particular, the elderly, young children and those with long-term health problems or a disability.

Our response provides evidence of the number of older dwellings in the northern regions, as well as case studies of measures that housing providers across the North are beginning to undertake in order to refurbish their existing stock and help them achieve greater energy efficiency. Some of the key areas highlighted in the response include:-

- Regenerating existing communities as an alternative Eco Town;
- Current technologies too expensive;
- Information a vital tool.

For further information please contact [Satty Rai](#), Policy Services Manager.

- **The Northern Housing Summit IV**

The Northern Housing [Summit](#) is now in its fourth year and has already established itself as **the** housing event for all those working to deliver housing and sustainable communities in the North. This year's Summit will attempt to make sense of the challenges set out by the new Prime Minister and how they will impact on the North including:-

- Supporting local authorities in their strategic leadership role
- The Housing Green Paper
- Comprehensive Spending Review 2007 and resourcing the North
- Sub-National Economic Review and the impact on regional structures
- The new Homes and Communities Agency
- The future of regulation and inspection
- Affordability and supply of land
- Low carbon developments
- New developments in community design

- Lessons from America – what can we learn from the USA’s success in regenerating communities?
- Community ownership models
- Housing’s role in social mobility and financial inclusion

Delegates will hear from an extensive range of speakers including:-

- Yvette Cooper MP, Minister for Housing (invited)
- Kate Barker, Housing Corporation Board Member
- Richard McCarthy, Director General, Programme, Policy and Innovation Group, CLG
- Steve Douglas, Acting Chief Executive, Housing Corporation
- Professor Steve Wilcox, York University
- Peter Dixon, Chair, Housing Corporation
- Roy Irwin, Chief Inspector of Housing, Audit Commission
- Wayne Hemmingway, Hemmingway Design
- Richard Donnell, Research Director, Hometrack
- Isobel Mills, Director of Communities, GOYH
- James Woudhuysen, Professor of Forecasting and Innovation, DeMontford University
- Max Steinberg, Chief Executive, Elevate East Lancs

This is a must attend event for all those involved in housing in the North. Places can be booked online at our [website](#).

Performance Improvement

- **NHC Performance Services**

The Consortium's performance improvement services continue to grow; we have recently carried out a successful systems thinking voids review with one of our members and will be working with other members throughout the autumn. In addition, our peer review training in the summer was enthusiastically received and we look forward to working with those organisations in order to develop peer review groups in the North West and on Teesside.

If you want to know more about what we're offering, please contact [Nigel Johnston](#), Performance Improvement Manager on 0191 566 1006 or mobile 07843 356445.

- **Managing Local Performance – Improving Local Services: The Performance Management Conference 2007**

On Monday 5th November, NHC is holding its 5th annual Performance Management [Conference](#) at York Racecourse. Following recent reviews in Government policy statements, it is clear that there is a shift toward internal performance management arrangements, with the promise of a reduction in mandated, centrally driven requirements. Outcomes for customers are at the heart of delivering services, and performance management arrangements must reflect this. After many years of responding to Central Government requirements, the sector faces the challenge of effectively managing the performance of services in a manner appropriate to local requirements, both within their own organisations and in collaboration with others. The event will look at this, and examine how organisations can move away from centralised command and control to a localised approach, managing services for and with local customers and partners, balancing costs and quality.

Areas to be covered include:-

- Effective programme management
- Efficiency savings for back office services
- Preparing for CAA
- Systems Thinking and shared services
- The role of ICT
- Peer review as a self-assessment tool

Delegates will have the opportunity to hear from:-

- Alison Brown, Lead Housing Inspector NE, Audit Commission (invited)
- David McQuade, Chief Executive, Flagship Housing Group
- John Seddon, Managing Director, Vanguard Consulting
- Steve Smedley, Head of Research & Development, Housemark

Places can be booked online through our [website](#).

Investment and Resources

- **Housing Finance Director's Briefing**

Housing is now guaranteed to be a key focus of the political agenda for the next few years – the key problems being lack of affordability and supply failing to match demand. The Government wants annual housing supply to rise from 185,000 per annum to 240,000 by 2016. It aims to increase its investment in affordable housing by £1 billion a year in the period 2008-11. But at the same time it remains committed to most development taking place on brownfield sites, better energy and water efficiency through the Code for Sustainable Homes and better design – all factors which suggest a higher cost per unit.

The Housing Finance Director' [Briefing](#) to be held at Leeds United FC on Thursday 1st November, will examine key questions such as: how all of this will affect the finances of LAs, ALMOs and housing associations, how will it be funded by the markets, and what will be the role of the new regulator for the sector in ensuring financial rectitude? With speakers including:-

- Mike Barrott, Chief Executive, Strategy, Finance and Governance
- Anne Kirkham, Deputy Director Decent Homes Division, CLG
- Steve Partridge, Director, Housing Quality Network
- Mike Jones, Executive Chairman, Tribal Treasury Services
- Mick Warner, Head of Regulation, Housing Corporation

Places can be booked through our online booking facility on our [website](#).

- Next Issue: January 2008 -

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