

**Welfare Reform Green Paper
In Work, Better Off: Next Steps to Full Employment**

Northern Housing Consortium Response

1.0 Background

The Northern Housing Consortium (previously the Northern Consortium of Housing Authorities 1974 - 2002) was established in April 2002. It is an independent non-party political, membership organisation working to improve and promote housing services across the North. Its 202 members include Local Authorities, Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), Large Scale Voluntary Transfers (LSVTs), Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs) and other organisations involved in housing.

The Northern Housing Consortium is governed by its members, who between them manage over 86% of social housing in the North, over 1.3 million homes. These organisations are drawn from the three Northern Government Office regions of the North East, North West and Yorkshire & Humberside, as well as the Housing Corporation (North).

The Northern Housing Consortium welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Welfare Reform Green Paper and sets out the views of its members in this response. We have chosen to respond to the three questions with most relevance to our members and have included a series of brief good practice case studies (appendix A) highlighting the role of the sector in achieving the government's vision of 80% employment.

2.0 The North

The green paper focuses on the on the long term sick and disabled, lone parents, older people and BAME groups highlighting important implications for our members due to the nature of the communities in which they work and the social and economic status of their tenants. The northern regions fair the worst in terms of overall deprivation¹. The North East recorded the highest percentage of Super Output Areas (SOAs) falling into the most deprived 20% of SOAs in England, with 38.1%. This was followed by 32.8% in the North West and 29.6% in Yorkshire and the Humber.

Research² shows that social sectors in the North East and North West regions have:-

- the highest unemployment rates well above the national averages,
- the highest proportion of households outside the labour market, and

¹ Indices of Multiple of Deprivation, DCLG, 2004

² The Demand for Social Rented Housing – A Review of Data Sources and Supporting Case Study Analysis, Sarah Monk et al, 2006

- the highest proportion with poor health

Life expectancy in the North is below national averages. The life expectancy in the North East is the lowest in the country and the North East has the highest % of people with long term limiting illnesses (22% - compared to English average of 17.9%). In contrast the East, South East and South West regions have the highest proportions of social housing tenants in paid employment.

3.0 **Question 3: Should we do more to ensure that our support for lone parents is accessible and useful for all groups, in particular those with disabled children and those from certain disadvantaged groups and areas.**

The most disadvantaged individuals and families are often clients of many agencies, and are often the most socially excluded experiencing communication barriers and mobility issues making it more difficult for them to navigate a new benefit system or find work.

The Northern Housing Consortium welcomes the move towards more **local solutions** and we welcome the commitment to broadening the range of services and support available. We believe this approach will provide a better opportunity for local authorities and their partners to develop solutions which overcome local barriers to employment and which suit lone parents, whether that is more subsidised childcare, tailored support for people with low level mental health issues or better transport links.

To be accessible to lone parents and individuals in disadvantaged areas, the services must be **based in the community** preferably making use of existing structures e.g. third sector organisations, front line providers. To be useful the services must also be **individualised**, outcome focussed, culturally acceptable and **flexible** enough to respond to changing circumstances. If outcomes are to be positive for the individual a broad range of services is required with multiple entry points - one size will not fit all particularly when supporting those with multiple barriers to employment. If a mixed market in provision does develop the whole process must be **joined up** to ensure that service users see a seamless service and a **positive outcome**.

We support the move towards **early and targeted intervention** and would recommend taking a case management approach to supporting lone parents and disadvantaged families. This flexible and individualised approach would help ensure a positive outcome and support lone parents to **sustain employment** into the longer term.

The social housing sectors experience of working in deprived communities and with vulnerable individuals make it best placed to be a partner in the delivery of employment support. Our members work on the front line with local offices and staff, and are often the first port of call for the disadvantaged. As such are important partners in helping to sustain employment into the longer term. We support the model of contracting being proposed – **strategically commissioned and integrated services**, which are personal and involve the customer in identifying their needs and aspirations, provided by a mixed market and measured on outcomes. Northern Housing Consortium members have long understood that locally responsive services which are jointly commissioned are crucial to providing support to individuals

with multiple needs and this is a model which very much reflects the way that we work. We therefore recommend that the DWP give a clear lead and support for **local partnerships which include the social housing sector** in achieving its vision in the green paper.

Research published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation³ highlighted the important role housing organisations play in lifting families and young people out of poverty. The research identified being out of work and having a family history of worklessness as key factors in perpetuating poverty and social exclusion and commended the work that housing organisations are already doing to help people into employment.

We would also like to see the DWP work with other government departments to **join up policy and strategy** in this area. The DWP will be aware that the Communities and Local Government (CLG) departments recent Supporting People Strategy *Independence and Opportunity* makes clear that the future direction of the programme is to ensure vulnerable people receive support to live independently and contribute widely to the social and economic fabric of society. Many of our members are providing services funded by Supporting People, which target disadvantaged groups and support them to gain skills, confidence and ultimately employment. The Jobcentre Plus is, in some areas, becoming aware of Supporting People provider links into the communities they wish to target. Their work has been welcomed and in some cases formal partnerships are in place but this experience is not uniform.

The DWP will also be aware that CLG has a £90 million programme which is transforming hostels into places of change where homeless people are not just given a bed for the night and a meal but access to the training and support to get on with their lives. Communities Minister Iain Wright recently awarded a fund for training and employment projects for homeless people in the North East and Yorkshire, including Tyneside Cyrenians and Crisis Skylight Newcastle in the North East, M25 Housing and Support Group in Doncaster, St Anne's community services in Huddersfield and Sheffield, Ryedale District Housing and the Assisi House Project in Bradford.

The Housing Corporation is also encouraging excellence through its 2008 gold award which will include the theme of "Tackling Worklessness". Entrants will be contributing to the delivery of the national PSA floor target for worklessness and contributing to meeting Local Area Agreement targets for economic development and enterprise. Partnership working with other bodies will feature strongly in the award and there will need to be a demonstration of clear and measurable evidence of positive outcomes over time⁴.

4.0 Question 11: What more could we do to help ethnic minority women, particularly of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin, overcome specific barriers they face?

We are aware that, contrary to perceived attitudes, DWP recent research shows that attitudes to work are positive amongst Pakistani and Bangladeshi women and views on balancing a career and family are changing. Research

³ What will it take to end child poverty? Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2006

⁴ www.housingcorp.gov.uk

shows that the practical barriers to work are help with childcare, better careers advice as well as challenging persistent and outdated stereotypes in the workplace.

Again, we recommend that local employment services provide individualized support which is accessible to these groups, again moving towards having multiple access points for support rather than the one-stop-shop type of approach. We need services which help these groups to develop skills which will help them to meet their aspirations and obtain work which helps them balance a career and family. All sectors should be encouraged to create partnerships between local employers and the community and good practice examples should be publicised widely. The Open House initiative in Appendix A is an excellent example.

5.0 Question 12: In exchange for more specialist support, are we right to ask for more of those who have been unemployed and receiving benefit the longest?

Yes, Northern Housing Consortium members see the evidence that poverty and worklessness divides communities. Full employment therefore matters to the North, and it is the right time to move forward on the issue of welfare reform. The guiding principles of reform in the green paper are ones which compliment the work of the social housing sector and we look forward to playing a full and active part.

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APPENDIX A

Tyneside Cyrenians www.tynesidecyrenians.co.uk

Tyneside Cyrenians aim, through various employment initiatives, is to give service users real work experience and a life changing opportunity. The skills they develop will be the key to a new life and will help them 'get back on track.' There is clear evidence that those taking part are benefiting from a sense of pride, raised self esteem and the prospect of a realistic chance of further employment.

In Newcastle City Centre Tyneside Cyrenians are providing construction skills training to homeless people; a yearly quota of jobs is guaranteed and links to private sector employers and a property development social enterprise will ensure progression. This project is the legacy of the acclaimed 'Self Build' project; in 2006 13 homeless people were employed to build the 'Garden Rooms' for other homeless individuals. This scheme was a national first. The 'Self-builders' were employed on fixed employment contracts and gained skills used in the construction industry and an NVQ Level 2 in Construction and Civil Engineering. The work was undertaken in unique partnership with Lumsden & Carroll, and harnessed contributions from across sectors.

The project resulted in seven of the thirteen men who at the outset were homeless, unskilled and unemployed qualifying with NVQ Level 2 in Construction Skills, establishing new homes, starting new jobs and stabilising previously chaotic lifestyles.

OPEn HoUSE

OPEn HoUSE was established in 2005 to promote equality and diversity in the housing sector across the Tees Valley and North East and tackle discrimination and inequality in the labour market. This innovative project led by Tees Valley Housing Group has been successful in opening up cultural employment opportunities in the region's housing sector. The main partners in OPEn HoUSE are Tees Valley Housing Group, Endeavour/North Star Housing, Jobcentre Plus, Coast and Country Housing, Business Link, Connexions, Talent Recruitment Ltd, Banks of the Wear Community Projects, Middlesbrough Council and the Black Minority Ethnic Network. As well as this development partnership, the project has worked with the organisations supply chains to achieve its aims.

In the first year of the project, 49 people attended the awareness days, with 40 applicants competing for 22 positions. Employment was offered to 25 people for 50 weeks, with training and progression opportunities, although demand from the community was much higher. The second year saw 103 applicants, with 42 interviewees being interviewed for 22 training places. The quality of the experience, skills and qualifications achieved has resulted in 82 per cent of those involved in the programme already receiving employment in the sector. This in turn has played a part in encouraging more people from the BME community to apply for work in the sector.

Step1 Programme

The programme is run on behalf of Salford Council by Great Places Housing Group and Contour Housing Group. The focus of STEP1 was to equip unemployed Salford

residents, through employment based training, with the necessary skills to access the job opportunities that will be generated by the housing investment programmes across the city over the next 5 -10 years.

A large proportion of the STEP1 participants are people who because of their, sometimes long-term, unemployed status experience a complex range of barriers to sustainable employment. Many past participants have grown up in a culture of worklessness and low aspiration. Problems including low self-esteem, low educational attainment, emotional and behavioural difficulties, involvement in crime, poor basic social skills, mental ill health, drug and alcohol abuse, and financial difficulties, have led to chaotic and disordered existences for many of them.

Following the formal end of the training programme the majority of trainees (80%) were still in permanent employment. Industry standard rates to complete training and apprenticeships can run as high as 80% failure. This strongly indicates that the programme does lead to sustainable employment and is valued by participants and employers alike. In addition, the programme has delivered considerable added value in terms of outcomes for individual participants, construction employers and Salford City Council and its partners. STEP1 creates a considerable amount of added value through the pastoral support provided. The pastoral support provided is designed to address these issues in three main ways. Firstly, a high expectation of participants is regularly expressed, helping to build confidence and self-worth. Secondly, practical advice and support is provided to assist with day-to-day problems and the development of life skills and positive coping strategies. Thirdly a referral system operates whereby participants are put in touch with specialists who can help with things like childcare or housing difficulties.

STEP1 participants have received support with:

- Housing issues
- Attendance and punctuality
- Financial problems
- Confidence building
- Time management
- Health issues
- Alcohol issues
- Communication skills
- Coping strategies
- Anger management
- English language skills

By enhancing the skills of Salford residents so that they can go on to access new job opportunities, STEP1 positively contributes to the growth of the local economy through the local multiplier effect. The particular advantage that the STEP1 proposal has compared with college based training schemes is that trainees are guaranteed a decent wage from the outset. This they are likely to spend in the regeneration areas where they work and in the communities where they live providing an economic boost, that will create more jobs for Salford residents, at the same time as the physical regeneration begins to take effect.

Wakefield Homebuilder

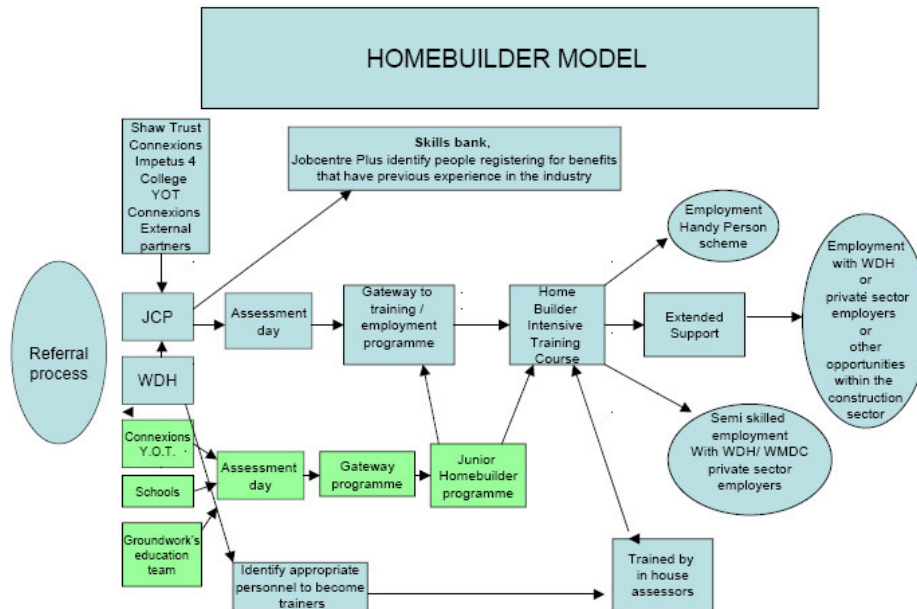
The Wakefield Homebuilder Partnership was established in February 2005 to provide a coordinated approach to the delivery of a bespoke construction skills training programme for the Wakefield district. The Wakefield Homebuilder Partnership

comprises key training organisations, industry experts and employers (including RSL Wakefield and District Housing) who are able to offer expertise and support to the delivery of the Wakefield Homebuilder training programme. Wakefield Homebuilder was designed to work towards addressing a skills shortage that is occurring within the construction industry both nationally and locally. The latest Construction Skills Network Report (published in June 2006) reveals that 87,000 people are needed nationally to join the construction industry every year between now and 2010 just to meet current demand.

The Partnership has made significant progress during 2006 / 2007 and is now entering its second year of operations. The Wakefield Homebuilder Partnership has brought a variety of benefits to Wakefield district through the programmes as detailed below.

- Supported over 50 people into full time employment within its first year of existence.
- Supported over 25 small medium employers with recruitment of their workforce.
- Secured over £1.2 million funding.
- Supporting over 100 learners work towards NVQ level 2 and 3.
- The programmes have worked towards training participants from worklessness areas; the programmes have helped individuals increase self esteem and confidence to allow the participants to enter full time employment
- They have supported the construction industry to address the local skills shortages within the district by delivering training opportunities, which are linked with the development of new employment opportunities within the construction industry across Wakefield district.
- The Partnership delivered a bespoke construction training programme aimed at 14-16 year old young people from Wakefield district.
- They are continuously working towards identifying, supporting and implementing an appropriate development route to improve basic skills needs.
- The Homebuilder programmes are continuously working towards supporting the construction industry in the awareness and qualification of Health and Safety of the workforce through the delivery of the CSCS card.
- Wakefield district are now seeing the benefit in having a local skills centre that delivers multi skilled training to the standards required to meet their commitments to the local community.
- Wakefield and District Housing, Strategic Partners and small, medium employers are benefiting from recruiting local unemployed participants who are trained and developed to the standard required to help address an ageing workforce.
- The Homebuilder Programmes are continuously working towards supporting small, medium employers in the recruitment and development of their workforce.

The diagram below shows how the Wakefield Homebuilder model works.



Councillor Phil Dobson

'Homebuilder is quite simply the most dynamic and exciting initiative available to workless people in the Wakefield district. Homebuilder has been designed to allow unemployed and disadvantaged people access to jobs in the construction industry – jobs that pay a living and offer career development.'