



Policy Digest

Oct – Dec 2006

Issue No. 9

Introduction

This Policy Digest provides a review of Northern Housing Consortium policy and an update on recent national legislative, policy and regulation issues that have an impact on our members in the North.

The digest is moving towards a more analytical and future focus. We welcome any comments from members on the new format.

Further information

Visit our website:

<http://www.northern-consortium.org.uk>

or contact the NHC Policy section 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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FUTURE NHC CONFERENCES

▪ **Neurological, 8th February 2007, Glebe Centre, Murton**

Approximately 10 million people across the UK have a neurological condition. Many innovative services to support people with long term neurological conditions are being delivered around the country and multi disciplinary groups of housing, health and social care professionals are taking this work forward. However, there is recognition that, too often, people have simply not received the support they need.

The Government's vision to develop services which deliver dignity for life is encapsulated in the National Service Framework (NSF) for long-term conditions which aims to ensure that individuals have access to services which meet their needs, maximize their quality of life and offer them dignity and control. This requires health commissioners to review the way they commission services, and makes particular reference to the need for assistive technology, suitable accommodation and joined up service delivery to provide maximum choice about living independently at home.

The challenge to the housing health and social care sectors is in joining up delivery of the NSF and providing better information to help individuals make more informed decisions about their care. This is about building upon existing services and developing networks which reach across housing health and social care to support people to be active members of their communities for the rest of their lives.

This seminar will bring together the NHS together with the supported housing sector and Telecare and aims to:

- Raise awareness and improve understanding of how individuals with neurological conditions can access housing that will support their rehabilitation, and services that can support their independence roles and how they contribute to improving outcomes for individuals
- Create opportunities for clinicians to meet networking and integration of housing and Telecare providers and to involve them in implementation of the NSF for long term conditions into local NSF partnerships
- Examine the key issues and challenges to joined up service delivery
- Provide better outcomes for people with neurological conditions.

Issues to be covered include the Department of Health guidance on commissioning for people with long term neurological conditions, due for publication in January 2007, Supported housing models – health and housing working in partnership and Promoting Independence through Telecare.

This event is aimed at everyone working with and providing services for individuals with neurological conditions, including Housing, care and support providers, Health and social care commissioners, including Supporting People Managers, Clinicians and Occupational therapists.

To book a place on any of these conferences or to find out more information go to <http://www.northhern-consortium.org.uk/Page/Events/>

▪ **Energy, 6th March 2007, York Racecourse**

Striving towards more energy efficient development is quickly becoming one of the objectives of all high performing organisations. But what practical solutions can we learn from other sectors, and how can the housing sector improve the level of carbon emissions. Housing contributes over 25% of the UK's Carbon emissions, and given the recently published implementation of the energy white paper cost of fuel and a higher than expected increase in the economy, achieving our targets for 2010 is extremely challenging.

This is our first event which is specifically interested in the requirements of housing organisations in reaching our 2010 targets. The well-established energy exhibition will also allow delegates to interact with a wide range of suppliers. This is something that the housing sector needs to respond to and respond fast.

Featuring speakers from the Energy Saving Trust, CAGE and National Energy Action, this event will explore:

- Alternative Energy Sources
- Environmental objectives for house building
- Addressing fuel poverty for vulnerable households
- Development of effective environmental policies

▪ **Stepping out – New ventures for housing, 22nd March 2007, York Racecourse**

In June 2006, NHC published a booklet called “Stepping out: New ventures for housing organisations” on the diversification of the business of housing. The report features case studies of housing organisations across England, that are going beyond their traditional remit as a social landlord, offering a snapshot of some of the more innovative ventures emerging in the sector today.

To obtain a copy of the “Stepping out” report contact jennifer.stevenson@northern-consortium.org

We are holding our first conference on the theme of business diversification following on from the “Stepping out” report. This event will provide delegates with an opportunity to hear about some of these ventures first hand. With tips on the potential rewards and pitfalls of diversifying, this conference aims to inform and inspire those who attend. Workshop sessions will be streamed into income generating activities and social and community investment activities. This conference is aimed at Directors of Service, New Business Managers, Business Development Managers, Finance Managers, Community Development Workers as well as anyone involved in developing new initiatives within their organisation.

NHC CONFERENCE FINDINGS

■ **The Performance Management Conference 2006** **“Managing performance, quality and choice”**

The theme at the core of this year’s Performance Management conference, which took place on the 6th November at York Racecourse, was how to achieve the balance between national and local priorities in delivering performance excellence. Delegates heard opinions on this from Audit Commission speaker, Graeme Foster and housing consultant, Janis Dean.

It is clear that new developments such as the Local Government White Paper and the Lyons Inquiry bring together changes putting the locality before the national, reducing the amount of top-down control, central government clearing space for local government, fewer performance indicators for housing organisations and a greater focus on residents perceptions. Graeme told delegates that to get performance management right we need to bring national and local indicators together, allow the freedom to make mistakes, ensure that real outputs are measured and that performance measurements are fed back into the organisation.

Janis talked about creating a performance management culture within organisations and how a performance culture needs to be developed and integral within the wider organisational culture.

In the professional practice sessions delegates had an opportunity to hear about some of the latest tools and techniques to improve services and manage performance.

- Robin Newby, Choice Based Lettings Advisor for DCLG discussed the perceived negatives and perceived positives of implementing a CBL system, offering tips such as considering concerns and consulting with stakeholders before designing a CBL system which will help to reduce potential barriers to success.
- Sally Trevaskis, Consultant, spoke on ‘balanced scorecards’; what they are and how they work as a tool for strategic measurement and management. Balanced scorecards allow organisations to clarify their visions and strategy and translate them into actions.
- In a session on knowledge management, delegates heard from two organisations that had implemented a knowledge management system and how this had helped them provide consistency of service and link their visions with their actions.
- The Consortium updated its report into systems thinking in Housing and representatives from the pilot organisations involved discussed with delegates the pros and cons of the approach in their experience.

In all, the sessions were found to be informative and useful and the overall event provided an excellent opportunity to learn from others.

▪ **Northern Futures Summit – Key messages**

The Northern Futures Summit explored how our housing offer contributes and supports the changing economic circumstances and aspirations of the North, through more effective partnerships to maximise our resources and realising greater benefits for our communities. The key messages for members included:-

- The North's housing markets and economies are improving but performance is inconsistent, and with a challenging CSR expected in 2007 we must all think more creatively, in order to deliver even better quality and better value for money with fewer resources.
- We need to look outwards and use the financial capacity in the sector. We must maximise our assets, skills and resources, develop partnerships with the private sector and understand and manage our housing markets better.
- Quality, distinctiveness and innovation are vital to developing thriving sustainable communities where people choose to live and should be embedded in our approach to delivery.
- Environmental sustainability is a key issue and the challenge is for the sector to develop all new homes to carbon neutral standards by 2016.
- Local authorities must take the lead in developing mixed solutions through partnerships which transform places not just homes. Taking a 'whole life' approach to development will require us to make linkages between disciplines – between strategic housing and planning, health and social care, community regeneration and economic development.

Services around the key messages from the Northern Futures Summit will be feature in the Northern Housing Consortium's new business plan, which will be launched in April 2007.

BRIEFINGS AND REPORTS

▪ **Housing and Healthier Communities**

It's come to that time when we start making New Year's resolutions after the overindulgence of Christmas and for a lot of people this will involve promising to go to the gym, exercise more often or to start that diet and begin eating more healthily. With the temptations of Christmas gone and a New Year beginning, this publication could provide your organisation with ideas on how to promote healthier lifestyles amongst your tenants!

Showing case study examples on how social housing providers in England are playing a part in improving the health of their tenants and the general community through healthy eating, sport and exercise schemes, this publication may inspire you to take action in bettering the health of your residents. Covering initiatives from setting up a food co-operative to organising basketball coaching sessions for young people this booklet also shows how these schemes have not only contributed to the health agenda but have in some instances helped to tackle anti-social

Download the PDF report from here <http://www.northern-consortium.org.uk/Page/Policy/briefingreports.aspx>

Request a hard copy by emailing enquiries@northern-consortium.org.uk

behaviour, improve social interaction in neighbourhoods and bring communities together.

■ **Systems Thinking Report**

This NHC report on Systems Thinking says that service improvement and efficiencies continue in systems thinking organisations. Wholesale efficiency savings and dramatic improvements in services to customers can be maintained and further improved using systems thinking. Systems Thinking involves looking at delivery of the service as a whole rather than individual parts and concentrates on identifying and removing waste.

In September 2005, the DCLG (then ODPM) published a report into the application of the methodology in housing, "A Systematic Approach to Service Improvement". This study, carried out for ODPM by the Northern Housing Consortium with three of its members (Tees Valley Housing Group, Leeds SE Homes and Preston City Council), looked at the effect of using systems thinking in housing management. The early results were impressive and highlighted the potential of systems thinking to deliver effective services efficiently - but were they sustained?

Download the PDF report from here <http://www.northern-consortium.org.uk/Page/Policy/systemsthinking.aspx>

The Consortium, supported by DCLG, has monitored progress throughout the year and has now produced a report looking at the sustainability of the approach. This follow up shows that, in two out of the three pilots, Systems Thinking has become embedded and further improvements made, along with six figure efficiency gains. Highlights include:

- Repairs – End-to-end time, initially 46 days and reduced to 5.9 days following the initial systems thinking work has further reduced to around 5 days
- Repairs - Customer satisfaction continued to rise with 75% of tenants (from 61%) scoring the service 10/10 and 95% scoring 8/10 or above
- Re-housing – The number of empty properties fell from 240 to only 118.

The report also highlights the need for a change in management culture. In the third pilot organisation, which was in the midst of transferring the stock, the method did not become embedded as management focus was, understandably on the transfer. However, it has not ruled out revisiting systems thinking once the new transfer organisation is fully established. The initial research found some evidence that performance indicators can dictate the way that the service is provided and that this is not always in line with customer expectations. This remains the case, though the direction of travel from government is clear in that performance measures should be based on service user experience.

Hard copies of the report are available at £5 each. Email nigel.johnston@northern-consortium.org.uk

CURRENT AND FUTURE CONSULTATIONS

■ **Building a Greener Future – Towards a Zero Carbon Development**

This publication is a consultation document seeking views on the Government's proposals to reduce the carbon footprint of new housing development. It sets out the Government's views on the importance of moving towards zero carbon in new housing and explores the relationship between the planning system, Code for Sustainable Homes and Building Regulations in delivering their ambitions for zero carbon. The document can be downloaded from the Current Activity page on the NHC website. NHC will be responding to the consultation. If you would like to contribute, please contact Charlotte Howse, Head of Policy and Practice.

Download these documents from the NHC website here <http://www.northern-consortium.org.uk/page/Policy/>

■ **PPS – Planning and Climate Change**

DCLG have also published a consultation document relating to the planning system and climate change. The document, available to download from the NHC website, seeks views and comments on a draft Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 'Planning and Climate Change'. The PPS sets out how planning, in providing for the new homes, jobs and infrastructure needed by communities, should help shape places with lower carbon emissions and resilient to the climate change now accepted as inevitable. NHC will also respond to this consultation and any contributions by members would be welcome.

Contact: anna.milner@northern-consortium.org.uk

■ **Delivering change through involvement**

This consultation paper sets out the Housing Corporation's proposals for a revised resident and community involvement policy that is planned to be published in April 2007. It sets out the Corporation's thinking about how they should revise their involvement policy to ensure that all associations put the views and interests of customers at the heart of what they do. The Housing Corporation is now seeking comments on the proposals over a consultation period of three months.

Download the consultation paper here http://www.housingcorporation.gov.uk/upload/pdf/Delivering_change.pdf

The Northern Housing Consortium will be sending a response to the proposals based on members' opinions of the new policy. To enable this response to be representative of opinions of all those working within the field of resident and/or community involvement and tenant participation, we ask that as many of you as possible send us your opinions/comments, supported by evidence wherever possible, and these will be collated into a formal response. The deadline for submission of responses is the 15th March 2007, but it would be helpful if any responses are received as soon as possible, by the 1st March 2007 at the latest in order to give us time to format the response.

Send your response to jennifer.stevenson@northern-consortium.org.uk

■ **Investment in the Regions**

The North was not encouraged by the last round of investment in regions. Consequently, NHC and northern partners put forward a strong case to government for improved methods of distribution. We have been

preparing for the current Investment in the Regions Consultation Paper over the past few months and will now be exploring the proposals put forward and be consulting with members on the impact for the North. For further details on this contact Charlotte Howse, Head of Policy and Practice.

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NATIONAL POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

▪ **Strong and prosperous communities: The Local Government White Paper**

The much anticipated White Paper on local government was published in October 2006. Headlines from the paper include:

- A refocusing of the LAA as the local delivery and performance assessment vehicle;
- Slimming down of performance targets - and a focus on outcomes where ever possible;
- Invitations for districts to submit proposals to transform into Unitary authorities;
- From 2009, a new performance framework, entitled Comprehensive Area Assessment;
- Pathfinder initiatives for new governance arrangements for districts not opting for Unitary status;
- 4 year terms for LA leaders (including new options for mayors);
- Simplification of access to Tenant Management Organisations;
- Alignment of consultation processes for Sustainable Community Strategies, Local Development Frameworks etc;
- Housing and Homeless strategies to be included as part of the Sustainable Community Strategy;
- Community Call for Action to challenge underperforming services and actions; and
- Indications of increased efficiency challenges.

The Northern Housing Consortium's new business plan, which will be launched in April 2007, will include services designed to support organisations in introducing the actions covered by the Local Government White Paper.

▪ **The Pre-Budget Report December 2006**

Gordon Brown gave pre-Budget speech in the House of Commons on the 6th of December. The Pre-Budget Report sets out how the Government intends to achieve its objective of building a strong economy and a fair society where there is opportunity and security for all. It describes the next steps the Government is taking to enhance its long-term goals of:

- **Maintaining a stable economy:** the economy is expected to grow by 2.75% in 2006 and 2.75% to 3.25% in 2007 and inflation is set to remain low and stable;

Read the full pre-Budget report here
<http://prebudget2006.treasury.gov.uk/>

- **Promoting enterprise, innovation and skills:** with measures to support innovation and health research, taking forward reforms of the planning system, greater ambitions for assisted home ownership, reform of the planning, funding and delivery of transport infrastructure, and a new ambition of world-class skills;
- **Delivering high employment:** by extending the support offered to help lone parents into employment, improving Jobseeker's Allowance, and improving enforcement of the National Minimum Wage;
- **Building a fairer society:** with a rise of £80 in the child element of the Child Tax Credit from April 2007, from April 2009 every mother-to-be will be eligible for Child Benefit from week 29 of their pregnancy, making Individual Savings Accounts permanent, an extension of the Warm Front programme, and measures to promote fairness in the tax system;
- **Delivering high quality public services:** with a new ambition of at least 3% savings per year across central and local government, publication of Sir David Varney's review of public service transformation, a commitment for capital investment in education to rise, and funding of £84 million for counter-terrorism and intelligence;
- **Protecting the environment:** with an increase in all rates of air passenger duty with effect from February 2007, an ambition for all new homes to be zero carbon by 2016, an increase in the main road fuel duties in line with inflation, and measures to promote the use of cleaner fuels.

The important points for housing from the report included the announcement that the majority of new homes in the UK should be "zero-carbon" by 2016. This will be achieved by exempting such homes from stamp duty for a limited period, starting next year. The Chancellor committed the UK to making every new home built zero-carbon within 10 years. The pre-Budget report also promised that through an extension of the Warm Front programme, a further 300,000 households are to be offered free insulation and central heating.

As well as these energy efficiency measures for housing, the pre-Budget report included plans to take forward reforms to ensure greater flexibility in the planning system, following the publication of Kate Barker's Review of Land Use Planning. This includes planning decisions on major infrastructure projects to be made by an independent planning body. The pre-Budget report announced greater ambitions for assisted home ownership through shared equity schemes seeing another 160,000 families helped on the housing ladder this way.

■ **Housing's Carbon Footprint**

Following on from Gordon Brown's pre-Budget report, it is clear to see that energy efficiency and the environment are high on the Government's agenda at the moment. With reports like the Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change pushing concerns about the environment further into the media spotlight and ministers such as Yvette Cooper and David Milliband referring often in their speeches to climate change and

carbon emissions; the time is now for housing organisations to take action.

Referred to in Gordon Brown's pre-Budget speech, the initial report on the Energy Efficiency of Dwellings from the Review of the Sustainability of Existing Buildings was released at the beginning of November. It found that carbon emissions for the domestic building stock were responsible for 41.7 million tonnes of carbon (MtC) in 2004; over a quarter of the UK's total carbon emissions. In order to meet government targets, domestic emissions would have to fall to 17 MtC per annum by 2050 if the domestic sector were to reduce in line with overall carbon emissions targets. As a result of The Stern Review, the new target for the European Emissions Trading Scheme (EETS) is to reduce carbon emissions by 30% by 2020 and by 60% by 2050.

Read the full report here
http://www.communities.gov.uk/pub/373/TheEnergyEfficiencyofDwellingsInitialAnalysis_id1504373.pdf

The initial analysis of the energy efficiency of dwellings found that the existing housing stock accounts for the great majority of carbon emissions from dwellings, both in terms of their lower energy efficiency and their numbers. While Building Regulations have been raising the energy efficiency standards of new homes in recent years, the report tells us that around two-thirds of homes standing in 2050 will have been built before 2005, and therefore constructed to lower standards than new build homes today. In order to improve energy efficiency in the existing stock, a combination of improving insulation and using the most efficient heating systems is necessary. The most commonly applied potential energy efficiency measures are: hot water cylinder insulation, cavity wall insulation, loft insulation, improved heating controls, draught proofing, A-rated boiler, and double glazing. Cavity wall insulation currently offers the largest potential carbon saving per dwelling and across the whole stock within a three year payback period.

The report considered the implications the government's carbon reduction measures will have for the future of the housing stock. If we were to seek to reduce carbon emissions from households in line with the overall carbon emissions target for the UK, then the net reduction required would be 25.5 MtC. The analysis determined that if the top five measures offering the fastest pay back to households are adopted (basic insulation and better heating controls) and more efficient boilers are fitted in all homes it may be possible to achieve a total carbon emissions saving of 7 MtC. However, this still leaves a significant shortfall of 18.5 MtC. The conclusion of the report was that in the long term the government needs to look at new, emerging technologies and a wider range of measures in order to meet the 2050 timetable.

The Consortium is embarking upon a series of projects around the contribution housing can make to the national target of a 60% reduction in carbon emissions by 2050. We want to understand what the carbon footprint of housing in the north of England currently looks like, what steps are already underway to reduce this, and in particular what progress we are making towards carbon neutral communities. In the first instance, we would like to hear from members of any initiatives, networks

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www.northern-consortium.org

or ideas that you are involved in that will help us in building our intelligence and awareness of the current northern picture – this will enable us to target our services more effectively to your needs.

On the 6th of March 2007, the NHC will be holding its first Energy Conference at York Racecourse. This event will cover government goals in the delivery of a more energy efficient society as well as feature practical sessions on eco-homes, renewal technologies and striving towards carbon neutral. As energy and the environment move higher up the Government's priorities they also become more of a priority for housing. This conference coupled with our well established Energy Exhibition will provide practitioners with vital information on the energy agenda.

To book a place or find out more go to <http://www.northern-consortium.org.uk/Page/Events/>

Also in the New Year, the NHC will begin researching case study examples of housing organisations and developers leading the way in terms of energy efficiency in housing. It is envisaged that this will bring together the good practice housing providers and constructors are achieving in lowering carbon emissions and gaining greater energy efficiency in their homes. If you know of any good practice or are doing anything in this area please contact Jennifer Stevenson, Research and Intelligence Assistant.

For more information contact jennifer.stevenson@northern-consortium.org.uk

■ **Planning Policy Statement 3 and the Barker Review of Land Use Planning**

At the end of November, Housing Minister Yvette Cooper set out the new planning guidelines for housing under PPS3. The new guidelines replace Planning Policy Guidance 3 and underpin the Government's response to the Barker Review of Housing Supply. The new PPS3 is intended to help create better quality and more affordable family homes as well as reducing planning hold-ups and speeding up development.

Read the full PPS3 here <http://www.communities.gov.uk/pub/806/PlanningPolicyStatement3Housingid1504806.pdf>

The statement sets out the Government's key housing policy goal which is "to ensure that everyone has the opportunity of living in a decent home, which they can afford, in a community where they want to live". This will be achieved by requiring local authorities to identify more sites for housing, plan 15 years ahead, as well as emphasise the need for better quality design and stronger environmental standards. New developments will have to take account of the need to cut carbon emissions and to move towards zero carbon building projects. The new guidance will also see councils building more houses, rather than flats and making areas more family-friendly. Within this, local authorities will need to ensure there are enough family homes in their areas and for the very first time ensure the housing needs of children are being met.

Read the full Barker Report here http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/4EB/AF/barker_finalreport051206.pdf

Only a few days after PPS3 was launched, Kate Barker's conclusions on the planning system were published in the Barker Review of Land Use Planning Final Report. The review has recommended a massive overhaul of the planning system as well as the need for a new national planning body to have the final say on major infrastructure projects. The

strong collaborative working. This report provides a summary of the three key work streams in the submission, what we asked for, and what the Minister said.

1) **Equity Loans** – We are committed to the move from grants to loans, however it is becoming increasingly clear that we must attract significant levels of private sector investment if we are to deliver national and regional housing priorities. There have been some successes but the private sector are reluctant to invest in products that do not have tried and tested track records. We asked the Government to take a stronger lead on enabling and supporting the delivery of equity loan products, by:-

- Sending out a clear signal of the importance it places on this move to ensure a common approach to deliver;
- Exploring the potential of the Government acting as a loan guarantor for private sector investment;
- Working with us to identify an appropriate pilot for a sub-regional lending scheme, perhaps through an MAA strategic approach.

Government response

- Priority of the Shared Equity Task Force is new build, however civil servants are interested in our models for improvements to existing homes/re-location loans and are happy to receive models i.e. Y&H Regional Loan Fund (via Sheffield) and Manchester City Region;
- No obvious solution to the issue of Government acting as guarantor, but the Minister said she would refer it to Treasury;
- One option put forward for encouraging private sector participation was along the lines of Social Housing Grant where public sector funding is supported by private finance, say on a 50/50 basis. The Minister was interested in seeing this model developed;
- The Minister was interested in using equity to promote the need for environmental change and would like to see loans for energy efficiency works included within our range of loans products.

2) **Local/Multi/Neighbourhood Area Agreements** – We provided evidence of the valuable role that housing has to play in Local Area Agreements, and we welcomed the recognition, in the Local Government White Paper, of the future role of LAA's. We asked the Government to give us the opportunities and the tools to make the necessary links between Local Area Agreements (LAA's), Multi Area Agreements (MAA's) and Neighbourhood Area Agreements (NAA's) through:-

- Piloting ways of making this a reality;
- Developing a sub regional approach to market renewal through the MAA, with the support the Regional Housing Boards.

Government response

- Total support and therefore convergence of ideas. Saw this as supporting the work of DCLG;

- Keen to see the mix/match of funding brought together for value added initiatives;
 - Will support a one size does not fit all approach, and happy to see developments in the 3 regions with their respective Regions/GOs/LAs. Will support initiatives/pilots.
- 3) **Affordable Housing** – If we are to meet affordability problems, we recognise that housing organisations across the sector must make the most effective use of their assets. There are barriers in doing so and we require Government support to affect change by: -
- Enabling the more effective use of existing assets, and looking at ways to recognise and reward organisations that demonstrate they have maximised their contribution to the delivery of affordable housing. For local authorities this includes the revision of the Treasury’s ‘best consideration’ rules to further incorporate the added social value of using land for affordable housing and a review of CPA to reward local authorities who provide land which brings added value from affordable housing. For housing associations it is about exploring how delivering sustainable communities can be reconciled alongside responsibilities for affordability. For ALMO’s we are looking for policies that enable ALMO’s to obtain additional resources through the securitisation of their rental stream;
 - Ensuring the revised planning framework maximises opportunities for the delivery of affordable housing. We asked Government to give a clear directive to authorities to have responsive planning policies in place. We also welcomed the opportunity to discuss with Government the need to ensure that Planning gain Supplement does not stifle land release or further depress any Section 106 contributions to affordable housing.

Government Response

- In general happy to work with LAs to remove barriers to release of land. Government looking at different models, and Minister found it extremely useful to hear what the issues were/what we were doing;
- Wanted to see more promotion of LA keeping ownership of land with the cost of owner occupation/shared ownership only against construction;
- We made the case for incentivisation e.g. through CPA, for it to work for LAs;
- Housing Associations - happy for them to deliver within their parameters. Work ongoing to look at the use of reserves;
- ALMOs – didn’t believe model existed outside of PSBR, but would examine and work with any ALMOs who came forward with models. Bolton pursuing with DCLG. Minister keen to see tenant controlled ALMOs;
- Was supportive on the points around planning. Specifically:
- Will retain flexibility on minimum threshold for affordable housing sites to go below 15 units as per PPS3;

- Guaranteed that S106 would be retained for affordable housing (outside of Planning Gain Supplement) and that PPS3 would deliver all we wanted;
- Clarity on PGS would be out by the end of 2006.

Preventative Action

In addition to the three work streams we asked the Government to support a review (perhaps through an inter-disciplinary task force) of the costs of intervention, and long term benefits in terms of savings on other public sector spending such as health, criminal justice and employment. The work that housing and other partners do by putting greater emphasis on intervention and prevention needs to be recognised through a review of the costs of intervention and savings later in the 'system' and the reallocation of resources to reflect this. The Minister would support a study to look at the cost benefit of preventative actions on housing and other areas, and will attempt to find funding from Neighbourhood Renewal Section.

The meeting with the Minister was positive in terms of being able to demonstrate our collaborative approach on specific policy areas and get support for the direction we are taking. It was a good opportunity to raise the profile of a number of key issues with the Minister in the light of CSR, and that we needed to continue the dialogue with the Minister to highlight the position of the North. The Minister welcomed regular dialogue with the northern regions, and agreed to set up 6 monthly meetings.

REGULATION AND INSPECTION NEWS

▪ Local Government white paper and performance

The local government white paper, 'Strong and prosperous communities', published in October by DCLG, contains a number of features that will impact on regulation, inspection and performance management.

The Government states its aim to reduce the number of performance indicators to be centrally reported to (only?) 200 across 35 services areas. This is backed up by the work of the "Lifting the burdens" task force, which is looking at ways to streamline the reporting of performance to government. In a housing sense, the Housing Corporation plan to have only 8 key indicators from April 2007 continues the theme.

However, there is an expectation that organisations will replace the central indicators with localised management and local indicators reflecting the needs of citizens and residents.

For inspection, the strategic aim of risk-based assessment will continue along with area based assessment of the basket of services available to residents. This Comprehensive Area Assessment will eventually replace the existing CPA arrangements, but is not expected to be operating until 2009. Watch for a series of consultation papers, which the Consortium will be pleased to get your views on.

The triggers for inspection are still not finalised. Of course, the existing arrangements for re-inspecting poor performers remain in place, but other triggers around poor performance indicators, resident dissatisfaction and a "community call for action" are under discussion.

The Consortium held its annual Performance Management conference in November, a report of which is included in this digest.

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POLICY DIGEST QUESTIONNAIRE

We have recently redesigned and reformatted the quarterly Policy Digest and would like to get some feedback from our readers on this. We would be very grateful if you could take your time to fill in this brief questionnaire and return it to us either by email or post. Thank you for your help.

Q.1. How useful do you find the quarterly policy digest?

- Very useful 1
- Somewhat useful 2
- Not useful 3

Q.2. How would you rate this quarter's digest in terms of content?

- Very good 1
- Good 2
- Neither good nor poor 3
- Poor 4
- Very poor 5

Q.3. How would you rate the appearance and layout of the digest?

- Very good 1
- Good 2
- Neither good nor poor 3
- Poor 4
- Very poor 5

Q.4. Do you think the issues covered in the policy digest are relevant and timely?

- Yes 1
- No 2

Q.5. Please use this space to add any other comments you may have regarding the quarterly policy digest and tell us what you think:

Email to: jennifer.stevenson@northern-consortium.org.uk

Post to: Northern Housing Consortium, Webster's Ropery, Ropery Road, Deptford Terrace, Deptford, Sunderland, SR4 6DJ