



A Respect Standard for Housing Management

DCLG April 2006

Northern Housing Consortium Response to Questions

1.0 Background

- 1.1 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, not for profit organisation working to improve and promote housing services across the North. Its 179 members include Local Authorities, Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs) and other organisations involved in housing.
- 1.2 The Northern Housing Consortium (NHC) is governed by its members, who between them manage over 86% of social housing in the North, over 1.3million 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).
- 1.3 The Consortium aims in this response to provide the DCLG with information from our members and in particular from the North East Anti-Social Behaviour Working Group that we facilitate.

2.0 Overall Response

- 2.1 The Northern Housing Consortium and members welcome the opportunity to consult with the DCLG on a Respect Standard for Housing Management. There is agreement with the DCLG that it is difficult for government to be prescriptive about how problems of ASB should be tackled, and there is also agreement that signing up to a set of commitments that allow for flexibility and innovation is certainly useful.
- 2.2 The overall impression of the commitments outlined in the consultation is that they reflect much of what housing providers are currently achieving in

the North, so it is pleasing to see a clear correlation between practice and the commitments proposed by the DCLG.

- 2.3 Whilst members agree that this is a useful tool to promote a high standard of housing management, there is recognition that other services in the public interest outside of social housing also need a similar standard. There is a concern that although the social housing sector understands the need to take on this responsibility, the commitment sought from other service providers is as yet uncertain. This if not addressed will hinder effective partnership working.
- 2.4 As with any consultation there are a few other grey areas that need to be addressed by the DCLG, and these are outlined below in the specific response to the questions.

3.0 Specific Response to questions

Question (A) - Does the standard as drafted properly reflect the core components of delivering effective services in tackling anti-social behaviour and delivering respect?

- 3.1 The general feeling is that the core components of the standard reflect much of the good practice that is out there at present, and our members are pleased to see this. The standard will hopefully give credit to those organisations and encourage the ones who need it to move towards it.
- 3.1.2 However, as part of commitment 3, it must be recognised by the DCLG that although our members are committed to providing the best support that they can for new and vulnerable residents the often complex needs presented are costly and more funding could be needed in order to fully support residents effectively.

Question (B) – Is the standard as drafted suitable for adoption by all social landlords (i.e. tailorable to a diverse range of contexts?). For example is it likely to be applicable to smaller landlords?

- 3.2 It is fair to say that there are some social landlords who due to their size deal with anti-social behaviour more regularly. However in the main what has been drafted is suitable for adoption for all social landlords, although consideration must be given to disseminating good practice to smaller landlords, as due to their size some of the smaller landlords may have capacity issues to overcome in the first instance. The proposal by the DCLG to disseminate good practice is encouraging and as a first step the NHC consider the Respect website as the ideal place to place best practice examples against each of the commitments.

- 3.2.1 Guidance for smaller organisations on establishing and operating alliances with larger organisations to deliver ASB services in partnership would be helpful. This would build help capacity in the smaller organisations, provide for effective partnerships and consistency in service delivery for residents.
- 3.2.2 The principle of this standard will be for housing organisations to assess their current procedures and identify any areas that need addressing. It would be useful for all organisations, and particularly small organisations to still be able to sign up on a preliminary basis, with a view to full commitment within a set timescale whilst they work on what they need to do in order to reach the standard. We feel that smaller organisations may be slower to sign up to the standard and may be put off if they feel that they have a lot of work to do, so the opportunity to engage interest early may prove useful for the DCLG.

Question (C) – Does the level of detail provided in the draft standard provide landlords and residents with enough information on what is required in meeting it?

- 3.3 The detail is there but it is our view that the standard can be made more meaningful if residents are empowered through involvement in the standard from the beginning. The sign up would be an ideal opportunity to ensure that this standard is not solely in ownership of housing organisation officers, and will provide the basis for successful delivery. The commitments themselves are clear but residents must understand how they fit in to the standard and what will be expected of them.

Question (D) – Do you have any other comments about the proposal, including any practical implications you think it might have? For example, how can we best ensure we minimize any additional bureaucracy?

- 3.4 An issue of importance will be where accountability for the standard sits within organisations. A suggestion put forward by Gateshead council has been for a nominated person to take on the challenge of championing the Respect Agenda. This should ensure that the agenda does not lose any of its focus within organisations and is built into emerging policy automatically.
- 3.4.1 In order for other sectors outside of housing to understand the implications of this management standard and their role as a partner, it is the view of the NHC that although housing organisations have a duty to promote the Respect Agenda, it would be useful for the DCLG to also target other sectors to raise the awareness and importance of this standard, and where necessary introduce a similar standard. This would enable housing

professionals and residents to have greater confidence that those other organisations will deliver the same high standards with a consistent approach. An example would be the need for good information sharing protocols to be consistently established.

- 3.4.2 The NHC see no reason for housing organisations to have anything short of a high standard when dealing with anti-social behaviour, however we do consider that there will need to be some recognition for organisations once they have signed up and been regulated successfully against the standard to set an example to others.
- 3.4.3 On the point of bureaucracy, we feel this should be minimized wherever possible in order to encourage innovation and a diverse range of good practice. Despite this, there will be a need to ensure that the standard is maintained and mechanisms will need to be effective and relevant to the aims of the Respect standard.
- 3.4.4 As a final point the consultation suggests that in addition to a revised KLOE there could be separate assessments in the form of 'Respect Diagnostics'. There are no real objections to this, although our members would like more detail on how this will work in practice if introduced.

4.0 Conclusion

- 4.1 The Northern Housing Consortium welcome the opportunity to give our views on what is an increasingly important area of housing management. Our members are fully committed to dealing with anti-social behaviour and there are many excellent examples of good practice throughout the North of England that the DCLG will be able to draw upon in future dissemination of good practice.

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June 2006