

'Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS'

Yesterday saw the publication of the Department of Health's White Paper, 'Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS', setting out government's long-term proposals for a major shake-up of the National Health Service (NHS). The White Paper is centred around principles of localism, accountability and customer focus, and outlines the abolition of Strategic Health Authorities and the creation of the NHS Commissioning Board, which will be responsible for allocation and accountability of NHS resources. GP consortia will have a much stronger role in commissioning of local services, whilst Primary Care Trust powers will transfer to Local Authorities as part of their public health role.

Charlotte Harrison, Director of Policy and Strategy at the Northern Housing Consortium (NHC), commented, "The White Paper puts forward radical proposals for the health service, and we will be providing a briefing on exactly what the implications are for our members in social housing. Whilst we await the detail of how this will actually operate in practice, we do, in principle, welcome some of the proposals. The acknowledgment of the need to refocus on public health issues is pleasing, as we have long campaigned for a greater focus on reducing health inequalities - particularly vital for the North, as we experience higher rates of health inequality and consequently lower life expectancy. The enhanced role of local authorities in this regard is applauded, although we must ensure this is supported through effective resources."

"NHC members already actively engage in health and social care activity, and add considerable value through their roles. The impact of good quality housing on health has long been established. We are working with our members to build the evidence base to support further investment in homes as an effective preventative means of reducing health inequalities. From our Members' perspective, any attempts to make services more 'joined up' can only be positive. Our experience, however, is that integration is often patchy from one local authority area to the next, and housing sometimes struggles to get a seat at the table when health and social care issues are debated. We are hopeful that this White Paper's emphasis on alignment and focus on local areas will provide greater opportunities for more effective integration and better outcomes for people and communities."

For further information on the work of the Northern Housing Consortium, please email enquiries@northern-consortium.org.uk or visit www.northern-consortium.org.uk

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Notes to Editors

1. The Northern Housing Consortium is a non-political, not for profit, member based organisation, whose members between them manage almost 90% of social housing in the North. Our main roles are:
 - To provide a comprehensive range of timely, relevant and affordable services for members with a distinct focus on Northern issues
 - To take a lead role in enabling the improvement of housing and organisational performance in the North
 - To work with Government and other bodies to ensure the region benefits from the resources and funding available to provide safe, vibrant, sustainable communities